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# UKRAINIAN, POLISH AND RUSSIAN TRILINGUALISM AMONG UKRAINIANS OF NON-POLISH ORIGIN LIVING IN POLAND

## Abstract

This article examines the socio-linguistic situation of Ukrainian migrants who live in Poland but who do not have Polish origins. After presenting the issue and describing the group in question, the article then describes the locations where the languages are used, the personae of the interlocutors, and their emotional attitudes towards each of the languages.

**Keywords:** trilingualism; Polish language; Ukrainian language; Russian language

## 1 Background

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” – these words of Ludwig Wittgenstein best illustrate the situation faced by those migrating to another country. Once the Polish-Ukrainian border has been crossed, new opportunities, such as work or study, arise. However, migrants are also faced with new challenges, including learning a new language.

Acquiring Polish does not entail giving up the use of previously learnt languages. Ukrainian and Russian, with varying degrees of mastery, remain in the personal realm as the medium of expressing one’s thoughts.

The phenomenon of Ukrainian-Russian-Polish trilingualism is not new but has only recently become the subject of academic literature and language analysis. This article adopts a new sociolinguistic angle to describe the phenomenon by focusing on contemporary subjects who have arrived in Poland from Ukraine.

## 2 The state of research

Thus far, sociolinguistic research has focused on Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism.

When discussing research on Polish-Ukrainian bilingualism, first mention ought to go to Zofia Kurzowa's work (Kurzowa, 2006), which focuses primarily on the historical aspect of the phenomenon. In her treatment of Polish-Ukrainian relations she has consistently underlined the active and passive bilingualism of both national groups, which was conditioned by the political situation. Moreover, Kurzowa was herself bilingual as a child, hence her positive attitude towards both languages. This distinguishes her research from many other works which focus exclusively on the position of the Polish language or on interferences from other eastern Slavonic languages present in Polish.

Helena Krasowska's monograph, entitled *Mniejszość polska na Południowo-Wschodniej Ukrainie* (2012), constitutes an outstanding contribution to the research on the interaction between the Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian languages. In spite of the fact that the term multilingualism is missing from the title, in her investigation of the languages spoken by Poles in the Donetsk and Zaporozhye districts she devoted a great deal of attention to the interaction of Polish with both Ukrainian and Russian (Krasowska, 2012, pp. 139–246). Additionally, she mentions the Surzhik phenomenon, distinguishing her work from other Polish research on the subject. The national identity of her subjects holds a special place in her work in the context of the problems of Polish language education in schools and universities and the coexistence of both Polish and Ukrainian in the Catholic Church. Some of her respondents have been affected by the war in Eastern Ukraine and their fate is unknown.

Ewa Dziegiel published a monograph in 2003 entitled *Polszczyzna na Ukrainie*. In the fourth chapter – *Bilingwizm polsko-ukraiński* – she analyses Polish-Ukrainian bilingualism but Russian only appears sporadically in discussions of its use in everyday communication and is not consistently focused on in the work (Dziegiel, 2003), despite the fact that a vast majority of her respondents would have learned Russian until 1991. The occurrence of Russian in rural areas of western Ukraine is certainly significantly lower than in the east but trilingualism is also present there.

Katarzyna Dzierżawin has managed to reveal a different facet of Polish-Ukrainian bilingualism in her research on ethnically Ukrainian youths studying in Przemyśl and living in the border region. She presented the reasons for interest in Polish and Ukrainian, and the changing attitudes to these. Her subjects, some born in Ukraine and some in Poland, had different perspectives on their national identity. In their view, they study Polish out of necessity but learn Ukrainian of their own volition, in order to “be a true Ukrainian in Poland”. The secondary school students who participated in the research are rare examples of advanced speakers of the two languages who frequently use them both (Dzierżawin, 2009, pp. 425–436).

When discussing Polish-Ukrainian bilingualism and language interaction, it is important to mention the work of Pavlo Levchuk, *Bilingwizm ukraińsko-polski w świetle badań ankietowych* (Levchuk, 2015, pp. 143–158). The author presents the differences in language behaviour of speakers of Polish and non-Polish origin by comparing their answers to questions related to level of proficiency, frequency of use, and places and situations where communication occurs.

Larysa Masenko, regarded as the greatest authority on sociolinguistics in Ukraine, has devoted some of her works to Surzhik and Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism. Her publications *Суржик: між мовою і язиком* (Masenko, 2011), *Мова і політика* (Masenko, 1999), *Нариси соціолінгвістики* (Masenko, 2010) are regarded as theoretical, while *Мовна ситуація Києва: День сьогоднішній та прийдеший* (2001) and her participation in the INTAS project (2006–2008) under the supervision of Julia Besters-Dilger (2008) may be regarded as research works, as Masenko presents the position of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism and Surzhik based on field work.

The current migrational situation, namely the arrival and settlement of a sizable number of Ukrainians in Poland, necessitates research on Ukrainian-Russian-Polish trilingualism. This migrant group now has a clearly discernible presence in educational institutions, workplaces and entertainment centres. The presence of Ukrainians, often with no Polish provenance, requires sociolinguistic research in order to describe the functioning of this significantly-sized group of migrants.

The first attempts at this research have already been made and presented by Pavlo Levchuk (Levchuk, 2016, pp. 201–214, 2018, pp. 208–218). The results of the research presented here are intended to expand our knowledge in this respect.

### 3 Results

The surveys analysed in the current article were conducted between February and March 2016 in Cracow, Myślenice (*Małopolska Szkoła Gościnności* – Małopolska School of Hospitality), Katowice (*Uniwersytet Śląski* – The University of Silesia), Lublin (*Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej*, *Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski im. Jana Pawła II* and *Wyższa Szkoła Prawa i Administracji* – Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, and University College of Enterprise and Administration) and Warsaw (*Uczelnia im. Łazarzkiego* – Łazarzski University). Some of the questionnaires were completed online on a dedicated website. The questionnaire survey was terminated in June 2017.

450 participants declared their origin as non-Polish. As regards gender, females dominated with 63.8%, while men constituted 36.2%. The participants came from all regions of Ukraine. The majority – 13.6% – were born in Kyiv, 9.2% in the Dnipropetrovsk region, and 7.4% in the Lviv region. It is notable that the participating migrants from Ukraine did not only hail from western Ukraine. Most of the respondents lived in Cracow (27.7%), the Lublin region (15.8%), and Silesia (12.5%), which were the areas where the research was conducted. 97.2% of the respondents had Ukrainian citizenship. As illustrated in the diagram, 2% were school pupils and 53% were secondary school graduates, usually continuing their education in tertiary-level educational institutions. Almost 32% had already completed undergraduate studies and had continued their education in postgraduate courses or had started work. It is notable that 69.5% of the respondents' fathers and 74.8% of their mothers hold higher education diplomas, meaning that the subjects of the research grew up in families with higher educational status.

The following variables were indicated as motivational factors in learning Polish:

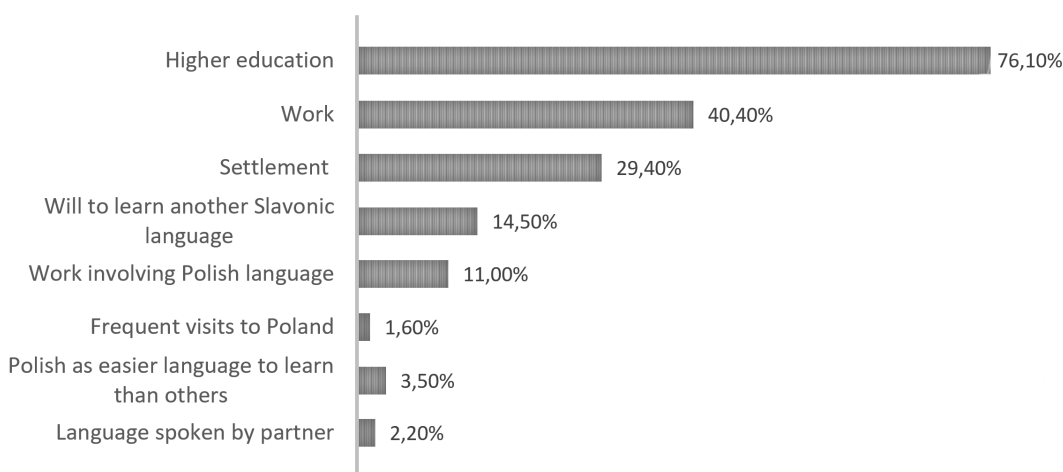


Figure 1: Incentives to learn Polish (author's own materials)

The main incentive to learn Polish is higher education. In the studied group, 76.1% are most likely already studying in Poland. The second most important factor is work. The third is the intention to settle in Poland. Most respondents were unsure about this, which is exemplified by the following commentary provided by one of the participants: *to live in Poland (I am not sure if permanently)*. The very fact of living in Poland necessitates learning Polish, as illustrated by the following comment: *because I live in Poland so I have to learn it [Polish]*.

Those who have already decided to settle in Poland permanently are obliged to take an official language examination in order to obtain Polish citizenship. This is another reason why they are learning Polish: *to get Polish citizenship*.

The respondents rarely selected the remaining options, which leads to the conclusion that the aforementioned three incentives (education, work and the will to settle in Poland) are the most important incentives to learn Polish. The other options were more popular among those interviewed in Ukraine, as Polish is not the dominant language there, whereas immigration to Poland has its particular aims as described above.

The perception of national identity, which may not necessarily change when emigrating to Poland, is an important consideration. The figure below presents the responses:

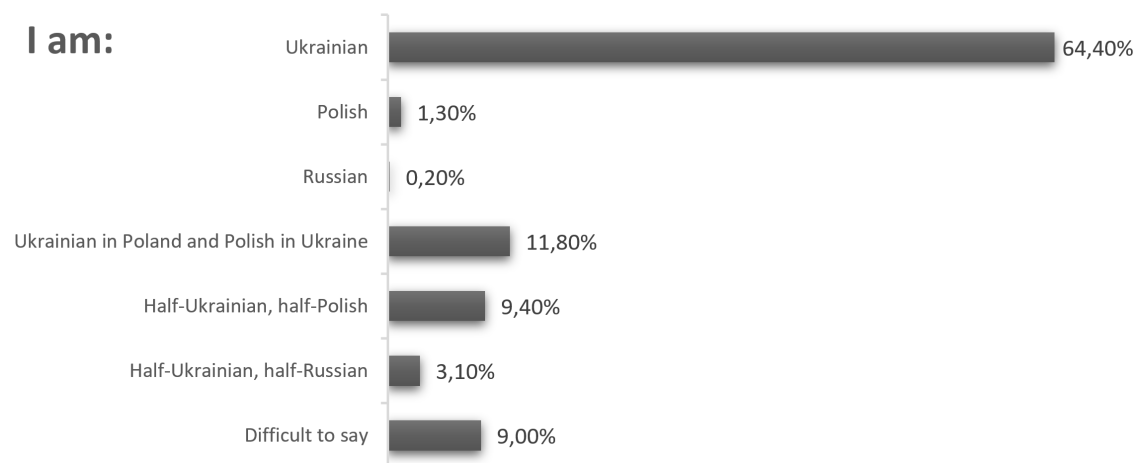


Figure 2: Perception of national identity (author's own materials)

The majority of respondents declare Ukrainian identity. In the research conducted in 2014 on Ukrainian-Polish bilingualism, Ukrainian national identity was indicated by 84.2% of respondents in the non-Polish origins group (Levchuk, 2015, p. 145). It should be emphasized that the respondents are not ashamed of their national identity and provenance, which can be illustrated by the following comment: *I am Ukrainian and would not like to change my citizenship at the moment*.

Those respondents who have already come to Poland, in very few cases, have also started to identify with Polish culture. Frequent exposure to both cultures leads to a double identity in which the respondent feels an emotional bond with both Ukrainian and Polish culture. The respondents living in Poland are more prone to develop a double identity.

Migration to a new country evokes a feeling of estrangement in the new environment, as well as in the original home environment, where a migrant begins to feel different as they perceive their homeland through the prism of experience accrued abroad.

The *'difficult to say'* response applies to those with parents of mixed origins, e.g. *I'm of mixed origin. My grandparents are from Greece, Russia, Ukraine and even Ethiopia, so I really can't say, or the respondent does not pay much attention to this aspect e.g. because I am a man and I don't talk of nationality, because I don't believe in the idea of nationality or nation*.

Another important detail seems noteworthy: fewer than 3.5% of the respondents mention the Russian origins of their ancestors, which unravels a completely different reality – Russian culture loses its significance once in Poland and is replaced by Polish culture, which becomes the indicator of national identity and cultural valence for a third of the respondents.

It would be difficult to describe Ukrainian society as monolingual. Discussions about the country's mother tongue / first language have continued since the moment Ukraine regained independence. The contemporary language situation is illustrated by the graph below:

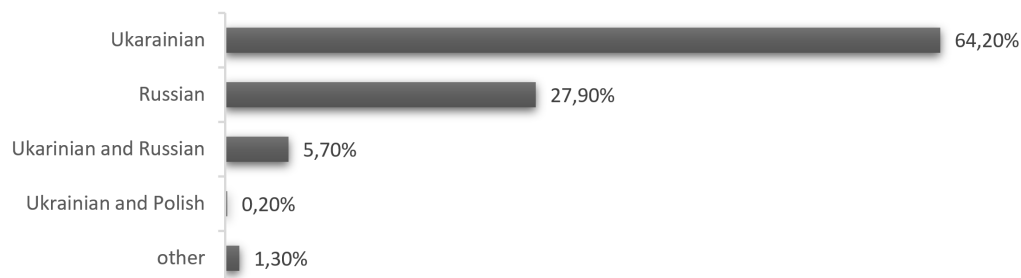


Figure 3: Respondents' first language (author's own materials)

Before moving on to a discussion of the research results, other sociological and sociolinguistic work needs to be mentioned. During the national census of 2000, 67.5% of Ukrainian citizens indicated Ukrainian as their first language; for 29,6% it was Russian. During the INTAS project (2006–2008), 55.5% chose Ukrainian as their first language while 32% indicated Russian (Besters-Dil'ger, 2010, p. 358). In the survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in 2016 and 2017, the percentages of respondents choosing Ukrainian were 68% and 69% respectively. In 2014, in the course of research on Ukrainian-Polish bilingualism, 74% of respondents chose Ukrainian, but it is important to note that 49.5% were of Polish provenance (Levchuk, 2015, p. 151).

Taking into consideration the results of the national census and the recent sociological research conducted in Ukraine, it is possible to conclude that the groups of respondents were properly selected as the differences in the results are marginal. On the other hand, during both the national census and the Razumkov Centre survey, it was not possible to select two languages, which seems to be a most desirable option from the point of view of linguistics.

The respondents themselves often remark that, despite choosing either of the languages as their first, both Russian and Ukrainian are used in everyday communication in professional, private and public contexts:

*Both Russian and Ukrainian are equally important to me because I speak them every day.*

*Ukrainian is my mother tongue but Russian is almost at the same level. For example, when surrounded by foreigners and talking about Russian, I consider myself to be its native speaker. In everyday situations, I use both.*

*Ukrainian may be the first language for the entire State, for the whole of Ukraine, but everyone has the right to use the language that is more convenient. So, Eastern cities tend to use Russian for every day communication. Personally, I use Russian. However, Ukrainian is the official language so it takes priority.*

The respondents' comments clearly show that the question of first language and its use is a complex one and requires a more detailed description.

The graph below illustrates the frequency of use of the Ukrainian language:

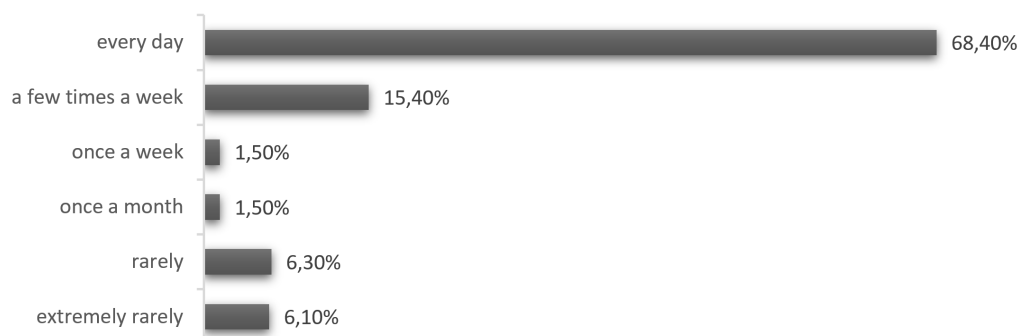


Figure 4: Frequency of use of the Ukrainian language (author's own materials)

Settling in Poland is not seen as a reason to stop using Ukrainian, which remains an important language for almost 69% of those surveyed. Additionally, 15% of respondents use Ukrainian several times a week. Ukrainian has lost its communicative value only for a mere 6% of respondents, as they use it extremely rarely.

It should be noted that those who consider Russian to be their first language view using Ukrainian in Poland somewhat differently. Only around 27% of respondents with Russian as L1 speak Ukrainian every day. 18% declare that Ukrainian has lost its communicative value upon arrival in Poland.

It is noteworthy to compare the frequencies of use of Ukrainian and Russian, as shown in the graph below:

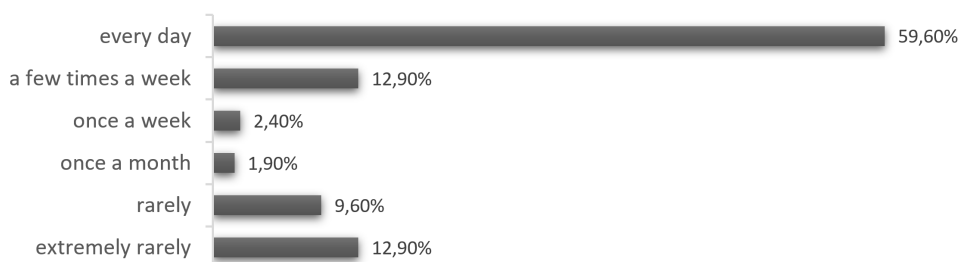


Figure 5: The frequency of use of the Russian language (author's own materials)

When comparing the everyday use of the Eastern Slavonic languages, one observes that Ukrainian is in a slightly better position. However, if those who speak both Russian and Ukrainian are taken into account, the position of the Ukrainian language is markedly better. Russian speakers, in contrast to Ukrainian speakers, use their first language in Poland significantly more frequently (98.5% use it every day).

The frequency of use of the Polish language, which is the official language in the country of residence for the respondents, is illustrated below:



Figure 6: The frequency of use of the Polish language (author's own materials)

The Polish language is the dominant language in terms of frequency of use among migrants from Ukraine, with the exception of those with Russian as their L1, who use their first language more often. Very few respondents declare 'rare' or 'extremely rare' use of Polish, which indicates a well-planned language policy in Poland which forces immigrants to use the Polish language frequently and, as a consequence, to learn Polish.

Having presented the frequencies of use of the three languages in question, the following section will focus on the motives behind choosing one language over the others:

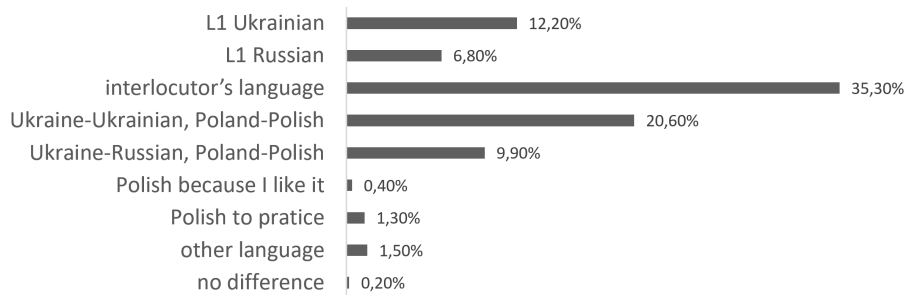


Figure 7: Motivation behind languages chosen to communicate

The basic criterion worth noting is that of first language choice. However, as is evident from the research, very few respondents are consistent in the choice of their first language, especially if it is not the official language of their country of residence.

Most respondents are likely to choose the language of their interlocutor, they adapt to a particular communication situation. The respondents who live in Poland can also choose the dominant language in this country, so 35.5% leave the choice of the language in the hands of their interlocutor.

30% of the respondents base their choice of language on the country they are in. Over 20% choose Ukrainian while in Ukraine and Polish in Poland, 10% choose Russian when in Ukraine. The remaining options were selected by very few respondents.

The places where the Ukrainian language is spoken are:

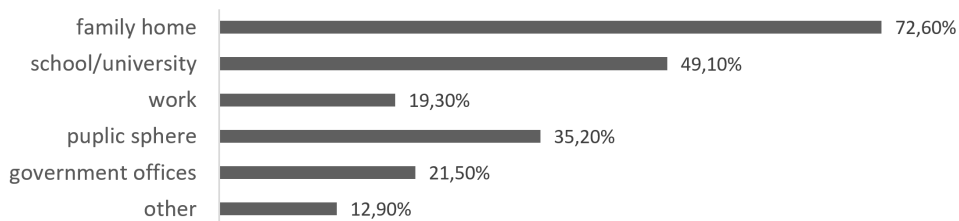


Figure 8: The places where the Ukrainian language is spoken (author's own materials)

Ukrainian is used most often when communicating with family, who are often still residing in Ukraine, making Ukrainian the dominant language of conversation. A half of the respondents use Ukrainian within the educational context, where there are frequently other Ukrainian-speaking classmates. In some private universities, Ukrainians are the prevailing majority and the presence of Polish students seems to have become something of a myth or an anecdotal joke.

The services sector in Poland, in the wake of the recent Ukrainian migration, has started to employ more Ukrainian-speaking salespeople, which has increased the presence of the Ukrainian language in the public sphere, namely in shops, restaurants, banks, tourist information desks or information services for foreigners, language schools, and university admissions offices. The Ukrainian language has penetrated various government offices, which is evidenced by the responses given in the survey.

The increased presence of the Ukrainian language has led to the need to employ Ukrainian-speaking staff, hence around 20% of those surveyed use Ukrainian at work.

The figures differ with regard to the respondents' use of Russian:

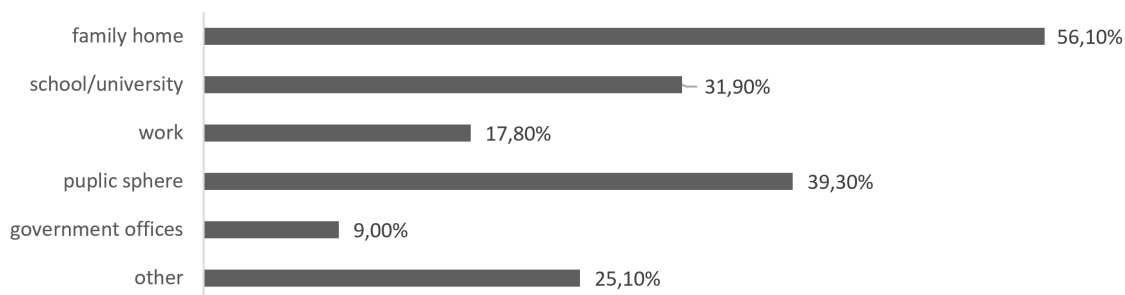


Figure 9: The places where the Russian language is spoken (author's own materials)

The communicative value of the Russian language in Poland seems to be weaker in all categories except for that of the public sphere, where the Russian language had entered earlier due to its communicative usefulness not only for Ukrainians, but also for representatives of other post-Soviet nationalities who, by and large, know the Russian language.

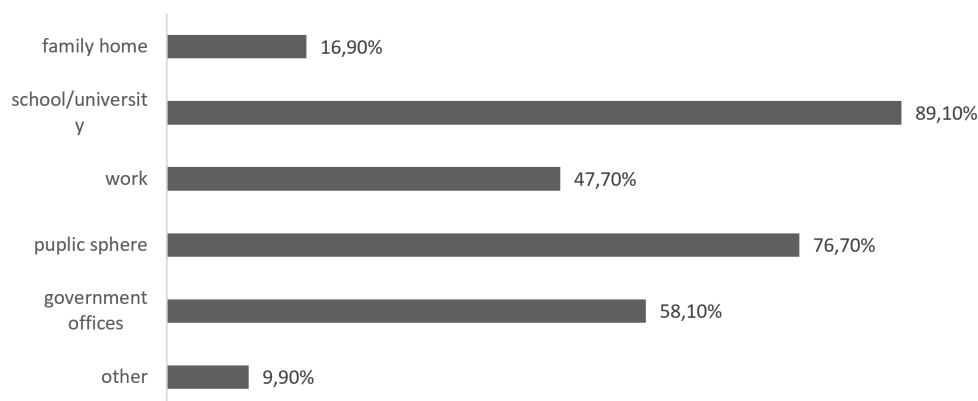


Figure 10: The places where the Polish language is spoken (author's own materials)

The Polish language seems to have an entirely different scope of applications. It is not the language of communication in the family but instead performs completely different functions, dominating all spheres but the family. Approximately 90% use Polish in the educational sphere and approximately 78% use it in the public sphere. For 48% of those surveyed, it is the language of communication in the workplace.

When discussing the places where each language is used, it is worth focusing on the 'other' variable which, in the case of the Russian language, relates to one in four respondents. During the survey it was possible for the participants to leave a comment. This was not relevant in the case of Polish and Ukrainian, but comments from respondents shed more light on the role of the Russian language. The role of Russian was reduced to one of limited usefulness, or limited to the role it plays in Ukraine-related media (Facebook, information searching, TV series, films). The usefulness of the Russian language stems from the media and is a consequence of the lack of a consistent language policy, which ought to have been implemented in Ukraine from the 1990s onwards.

Lastly, the emotional attitudes towards each of the languages was described. Two of the Eastern Slavonic languages evoke the following associations, cf. Table 1, p. 9.

A comparison of the emotional attitudes towards both languages clearly shows that Ukrainian is the language of ancestry. It represents a possibility to express one's identity and evokes a negative or neutral reaction in the respondents to a far lesser extent than Russian does. However, the value of Russian for one in three respondents is based exclusively on the possibility to communicate with representatives of other nationalities and as a language of everyday communication, in accordance



Table 1: Emotional attitudes towards the Russian and Ukrainian languages (author’s own materials)

<b>Emotional attitudes towards the Russian and Ukrainian languages</b>	RL	UL
I am willing to speak it and would like to learn it – it is the language of my ancestors	11.4%	<b>47.9%</b>
I am willing to speak it and would like to learn it despite the fact that it is not the language of my ancestors	6.1%	3.3%
It is the language which best expresses my identity	–	24.7%
I like it but do not feel the need to know it or use it	4.5%	5.5%
It is the language of everyday communication, I simply use it	20.0%	5.0%
It is the language of a rich literature and culture	7.7%	10.3%
It is an important language of communication with many people	<b>33.6%</b>	–
I do not like it	16.7%	3.3%

Table 2: Emotional attitudes towards the Polish language (author’s own materials)

<b>Emotional attitudes towards the Polish</b>	
I am willing to speak it and would like to learn it – it is the language of my ancestors	7.2%
I am willing to speak it and would like to learn it despite the fact that it is not the language of my ancestors	45.5%
I like it but do not feel the need to know it or use it	1.5%
It is the language of everyday communication	15.6%
It is the medium of instruction at university	16.7%
It is an important language of Europe	5.2%
It is the language of social advancement	4.4%
It is the language of a rich literature and culture	2.2%
I do not like it	1.7%

with the tradition of its use at home and in society in Ukraine. 16% of the respondents displayed an explicitly negative perception of the Russian language, which may be the result of the Russian invasion of the Crimea and Donbas regions.

The table 2 presents attitudes towards the Polish language.

Over half of those surveyed express both a positive attitude towards the Polish language and a willingness to learn it. One in three respondents has a neutral attitude towards the Polish language, which is the medium of instruction or the language of everyday communication. Compared to Russian and Ukrainian, Polish evokes the least amount of negative feelings amongst the respondents. This may be seen as a positive sign, showing that Ukrainian immigrants on the way to acculturation in Polish society.

## 4 Conclusion

In addition to physical relocation, the migration of Ukrainians to Poland may result in migrants identifying with Poland on the basis of a double cultural identity, although this may not necessarily

occur in the case of people with no Polish provenance. In the language sphere, a new language emerges – Polish, which is the official language in the place of settlement. In communication situations, Polish assumes the role previously occupied by the Russian language (public sphere, media), and in the case of Russian speakers – the role previously occupied by the Ukrainian language. After migrating to Poland, the spheres of language interaction known to the respondents lose their communicative role to the benefit of Polish, except for interaction within the family, where they retain their original L1. The Polish language is perceived in a positive light by the respondents, which can only serve to help them settle in Poland.

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