

# Negotiating language attitudes on TikTok

## A sociolinguistic content analysis

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### Aim of research

Presenting work in progress, this poster discusses the preliminary results of a corpus-based study on (changes in) language attitudes towards Ukrainian, Russian and Surzhyk as observed between June 2022 and June 2023.

### Corpus compilation

Corpus sampling and compilation took place in two waves in June 2022 and June 2023. At each observation date, we selected video clips from TikTok (26 clips from 2022 and 6 clips from 2023 so far) that addressed the usage of Ukrainian vs. Russian by Ukrainian citizens and whose authors expressed a clear stance either for or against the usage of Russian. We assumed that this would encourage the audience also to take a clear position in their comments.

The comments were crawled automatically, then filtered and annotated (for details cf. the twin poster on the computational aspects).

For the time being, the processed 2022 dataset contains 11,199 comments and the 2023 dataset contains 4,358 comments.

In both datasets roughly 40% of the comments are in Russian and 60% in Ukrainian (which roughly coincides with Kulyk's findings on language usage in the internet (Кулик 2023); cf. also Racek et al. 2023 on language usage on Twitter).

### Sociolinguistic analysis

**Caveat:** Our data are biased, as only persons with a strong interest in the topic take part in the discussion.

Our sociolinguistic analysis has two foci:

#### a) user's attitudes towards the usage of Ukrainian, Russian and Surzhyk and the arguments in favour of a given position

In both years, no anti-Ukrainian statements occurred. Shifts could be observed in the other positions: In June 2022 the discussion was very much characterized by the equation of language and nation (e.g. «Мова – це наш ідентифікатор. Лише завдяки ній, ми можемо вирізнятись серед інших») and an anti-Russian language position (e.g. switch from Russian to Ukrainian as everyday language – «до 24 февраля я была терпима к вопросу языка, после 24 виключно українською»). Yet in June 2023 moderate positions are more strongly represented, which question the unity of language and nation (e.g. «Але ми у вільній країні і ви не маєте право ділити людей за мовною ознакою..») and regard the free choice of language as a characteristic of a democratic society.

The anti-Surzhyk side considers Surzhyk the result of Russian colonization (e.g., «суржик – це бляха акт згвалтування української в першу чергу, а не російської, і звучить він абсолютно не красиво.») whereas the pro-Surzhyk fraction takes the position that Surzhyk should serve as *Ausgleichssprache* that will resolve the language conflict, e.g. «аби вся так країна розмовляла «суржиком», у нас би було менше проблем».

#### b) linguistic specificities of the comments

i.e. the languages used, instances of code-switching or -mixing and orthographic specificities with flagging function Generally, pro-Russian language or moderate comments are often written in Ukrainian and codeswitching or -mixing between Ukrainian and Russian is used to demonstrate one's own bilingualism, especially if authors take a pro-Russian language stance, e.g. «давайте розділяти російськомовних та проросійських. так сталося, що 29 років я розмовляю так, як розмовляю. менше українкою я не стала від цього...».

Additionally, we noticed several instances of Russian text notated with Ukrainian graphemes; the deviating orthography is used for the embedding of Russian citations in Ukrainian posts, e.g. a Russian-speaking woman's reaction on the request to speak Ukrainian: «і просиш перейти, а вона каже «какая різниця» «пачему ви єрундою займаєтесь» «вам скучна» «нашлись партіоти» то таких людей можна засуджувати.», and for comments regarding the language issue as irrelevant, e.g. «какая різниця как гаварить, главнає шоби люді хорошо себя велі. аааааа, коли вони вимруть?»

#### References

Racek, Daniel et al. "The Politics of Language Choice: How the Russian-Ukrainian War Influences Ukrainians' Language Use on Twitter." Institute of Statistics, Ludwig-Maximilians-University, 2023. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2305.02770v3.pdf>.

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