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## UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE AS A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE INVASION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**ABSTRACT:** In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict of identity, which began with the incorporation of ethnic Ukrainian lands into the Muscovite state and has been ongoing with varying intensity for almost 370 years, and has had the dimension of a large-scale war since the end of February 2022, language is not of little importance. Throughout history, as Ukrainians have defended the preservation of their national identity, an important, yet invisible front line has generally run along the language issue. While the Russian language has been used by the Kremlin as a pretext for invasion (the alleged defense of the Russian-speaking population), Ukrainian is often their last bastion of freedom and independence. While in Russia the Ukrainian language is treated as a manifestation of Russophobia in itself, for Russian-speaking residents of the occupied regions of Ukraine it has become a symbol and often the only possible manifestation of resistance to the invaders. A symbolic tool of struggle and defiance, an expression of hope, a yearning for independence and the epitome of patriotism in Russian-occupied cities is the Ukrainian letter "ї." In Russian-occupied cities such as Mariupol and Henichesk, the underground resistance movement adopted this very letter as a kind of symbol of freedom, painting it on walls, sidewalks, monuments, and other public places, risking repression and loss of life. The article sheds light on a unique aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict and analyzes how a single Ukrainian letter became, for predominantly Russian-speaking Ukrainian cities, a source of mobilization, a tool of resistance and expression of a non-Russian identity, a symbol of defiance against attempts to impose foreign military, political, and cultural domination.

**KEYWORDS:** Russian occupation, armed conflict, Ukrainian national identity, social mobilization

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, which had a hybrid form from March 2014 to February 2022 and turned into an open large-scale invasion from February 24, 2022, language plays a substantial role. Russian is a tool for achieving the Kremlin's geopolitical goals<sup>1</sup>, a pretext<sup>2</sup> for expanding the borders of the Russian Federation through annexation and occupation of part of a neighboring independent state territory. Ukrainian, on the other hand, has become the epitome of freedom and independence, resistance and a factor in strengthening the security of the Ukrainian state. It was the linguistic pretext that the Kremlin presented as the main reason for the annexation of Crimea and the incitement of separatism in the Donbass in 2014<sup>3</sup>, convincing the international community of the need to defend the Russian-speaking population<sup>4</sup>, which was allegedly discriminated against in these regions of Ukraine.

The so-called "Russian Spring" has made many Ukrainian citizens realize that language is not a neutral issue, and more than just a means of communication. According to the Russian

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<sup>1</sup> In the "Concept of State Support and Promotion of the Russian Language Abroad" signed by President Vladimir Putin on November 3, 2015. "Concept of State Support and Promotion of the Russian Language Abroad" noted that "the Russian language should be considered as one of the main tools for the dissemination and implementation of the strategic foreign policy interests of the Russian Federation" (*Концепция государственной поддержки и продвижения русского языка за рубежом*, 3 ноября 2015 г., <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/50644>, (accessed: 31.10.2023)). See also: N. Gergało-Dąbek, *Język rosyjski jako instrument wywierania wpływu w wojnie hybrydowej Rosji z Ukrainą*, [w:] *Bezpieczeństwo Polski w XXI wieku*, S. Jaczyński, M. Kubiak (red.), Warszawa 2019, s. 205-226.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Dugin, Russian ideologist of Eurasianism and neo-imperialism, stated that "the war began with language." (А. Дугин, *Украина: моя война. Геополитический дневник*, Москва: Центрполиграф, 2015, s. 378).

<sup>3</sup> Currently, ample evidence has been gathered that there was an invasion of the Donbass by Russian troops in 2014, as de facto confirmed by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (*Росія на Донбасі де-факто від 11 травня 2014 року: рішення суду у Страсбурзі і його значення для України*, „Радіо Свобода” 26 I 2023, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/rishennya-sudu-yespl-rosiya-vidpovidalna-za-donbas/32240172.html>, (accessed: 31.10.2023)). This is admitted by the separatist warlords themselves (*"Россия тогда ввела войска и спасла нас!" Ходаковский признал, что РФ в 2014 вторглась в Украину*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUciRgZ-6D0>; *"Никто в Донецке не хотел в РФ, все были за Украину" Российский пропагандист внезапно проговорился*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlb5v0SNXrk>; *Где вы были 9 лет назад? Как Гиркин начинал СВО в Славянске*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0t75-FSn20M>, (accessed: 31.10.2023) et al.).

<sup>4</sup> Russian diplomatic chief Sergei Lavrov justified the 2014 annexation of Crimea and military aggression in eastern Ukraine on the grounds that the Kremlin could not "abandon Russians and Russian-speaking citizens" in order "not to betray its civilization." (*Выступление и ответы на вопросы Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова на втором Международном научно-экспертном форуме «Примаковские чтения»*, Москва, 30 июня 2017 года, Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, 30.06.2017, [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2804842](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2804842), (accessed: 31.10.2023)).

government, the mere use of the Russian language is already an indicator of being a part of the Russian civilization, which is treated by the Kremlin as a right to decide the fate of Russian speakers living outside Russia<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting that the Council of Europe has declared unacceptable the use of the Russian language as a pretext for aggression against Ukraine<sup>6</sup>.

In the ongoing war, the goal of the Russian aggressors is not only the physical destruction of Ukrainians, but also cultural and spiritual destruction. The Ukrainian language has also become a battleground, as it is the language that stands in the way of Ukrainians being recognized as one nation with Russians<sup>7</sup>. In the occupied territories, Ukrainian citizens are tortured and killed for simply speaking the language. The invader's imposition of Russian culture and language has caused resentment towards the language even among Russian-speaking Ukrainians and altered the linguistic situation in Ukraine.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of the Ukrainian language as a national language on the mobilization and consolidation of Ukrainian society in the struggle against the invaders, and to show how one letter of the Ukrainian alphabet became a symbol of resistance and a manifestation of identity in the face of Russian occupation.

The theoretical basis for examining the significance of the Ukrainian language in the Russian-Ukrainian war includes social conflict theory (Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Lewis A. Coser and others), which helps to analyze the role of a language as a tool of resistance in situations where it becomes a tool of identity struggle. In addition, social identity theory (Henri Tajfel and John Turner), which studies the processes of cultural and national identity formation, is also helpful. Identity theory allows us to understand the importance of the national language for the formation of Ukrainian identity under conditions of conflict. Ukraine's linguistic situation is a post-colonial one, so post-colonial theory (Edward Said, Ewa Thompson, Mykola Ryabchuk, et al.) should also be considered for the analysis of the means by which the Ukrainian state and society attempts to overcome the effects of colonialism and regain cultural

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<sup>5</sup> At the meeting of the International Discussion Club "Valdai" on October 24, 2014, Putin stated that Russia has the right to defend "its vital interests of the Russian and Russian-speaking population in Crimea." (*Заседание Международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай»*, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>, accessed: 23 IX 2023).

<sup>6</sup> *Continued use of the situation of Russian as a minority language as a pretext for aggression against Ukraine unacceptable*, Council of Europe, [https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/full-news/-/asset\\_publisher/y5xQt7QdunzT/content/continued-use-of-the-situation-of-russian-as-a-minority-language-as-a-pretext-for-aggression-against-ukraine-unacceptable](https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/full-news/-/asset_publisher/y5xQt7QdunzT/content/continued-use-of-the-situation-of-russian-as-a-minority-language-as-a-pretext-for-aggression-against-ukraine-unacceptable), accessed 23 IX 2023.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g.: *Секретар радбезу РФ: Мовний закон розділяє "єдиний народ" України і Росії*, Zbruc, 26 I 2021, <https://zbruc.eu/node/102931>, accessed: 23 IX 2023).

and political sovereignty. The importance of the national language for the security of the Ukrainian state stems from securitization theory (Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver et al.), which has been the focus of some researchers<sup>8</sup>.

The article uses such research methods as content analysis enriched with elements of discourse analysis, such as descriptive method, analysis of found data, comparative analysis, and statistical analysis.

## LANGUAGE AS A MARKER OF BOUNDARIES

The Russian language for the Kremlin is an instrument for the rebirth of the empire. Russia uses it as a tool of expansion, a pretext for occupying foreign territories. With the help of the language, the Russian government defines the borders of the imperial state, claiming that "Russia ends where the Russian language ends"<sup>9</sup>. The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin in his article "On the historical unity of Ukrainians and Russians"<sup>10</sup> several times repeated that Ukrainians and Russians were united by one language, Old Russian language that was spoken both in the eastern and western Russian lands. No other spiritual and cultural factor of the nation's existence is a point of reference for Putin so often as the language - as many as 11 times. At the same time, he bases his considerations on pseudo-scientific deductions, attributing to the terms "Old Ruthenian language" or "Ruthenian language" the meaning of the Russian language. It should be noted that the widespread notion of an imaginary quasi-unified "Old Ruthenian" language was refuted by, among others, the well-known Slavist Michael Moser<sup>11</sup>.

The Ukrainian language undoubtedly stands in the way of recognizing Ukrainians as one nation with Russians, which is why Russia sees the language as a threat. The fight against the

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g.: Л. Масенко, *Українська мова як фактор національної безпеки*, [in:] *Мова: класичне - модерне – постмодерне. Збірник наукових праць*, Видавництво „Дух і літера”, Київ 2016, p. 5-15; N. Gergało-Dąbek, *Rola i miejsce języka państwowego w systemie bezpieczeństwa narodowego Ukrainy*, [in:] *Język w dyskursie o bezpieczeństwie*, ed. B. Jagusiak, A. Jagiełło-Tondera, Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, Warszawa 2020, p. 137-147; Eadem, *Державна мова і національна безпека крізь призму гібридних загроз*, [in:] *Освіта і наука у сфері національної безпеки: проблеми та пріоритети розвитку: збірник матеріалів III міжнародної науково-практичної конференції*, упорядн.: Дорогих С. О. та ін., НДІП НАПрН України, Київ, ТОВ «Видавничий дім «АртЕк», 2019, p. 144-148, et al.

<sup>9</sup> Матвиенко: "Логику Путина я отлично понимаю, он говорит, что Россия заканчивается там, где заканчивается русский язык...", *Цензор.нет*, 21 IV 2010, <https://censor.net/ru/n119373>, accessed: 23 IX 2023.

<sup>10</sup> В. Путин, *Статья Владимира Путина «Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев»*, Президент России, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>, accessed 23 IX 2023.

<sup>11</sup> M. Moser, *The late origins of the glottonym "русский язык"*, "Russian Linguistics" 2022, vol. 46, s. 365—370, [doi.org/10.1007/s11185-022-09257-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11185-022-09257-6).

Ukrainian language is of great importance to the Kremlin, as it is easier to annihilate a nation when its language disappears. Establishing Russian as the state language in Ukraine has been one of the Kremlin's priority tasks since Ukraine's independence. As influential Russian politician and director of the Institute of the Commonwealth of Independent States Konstantin Zatulin said, "there will be no truly anti-Russian state with Russian as the state language"<sup>12</sup>. In turn, Oscar-winning famous Russian director and supporter of Vladimir Putin, Nikita Mikhalkov, considered that the Ukrainian language by its very sound is a manifestation of Russophobia<sup>13</sup>. In Russian-occupied territories, including Crimea, the Donetsk and Lugansk regions starting in 2014, the aggressor has been imposing its culture and language. Books in Ukrainian have been removed from libraries and schools and burned<sup>14</sup>. The Ukrainian language ombudsman Taras Kremin' believes Russia is following a policy of linguicide<sup>15</sup>.

Linguicide against the Ukrainian language by the Russian authorities has a long tradition and has taken various forms over the centuries. An explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the rationale for the banning of the Ukrainian language in the Russian Empire in 1863 in the so-called Valujev circular: "nothing unites people politically as much as the unity of language and literature, and conversely, nothing separates them as much as the separateness of language and literature"<sup>16</sup>. The development and spread of Ukrainian language and literature, mainly in printed form, was seen by the tsarist authorities as "an intervention threatening the unity and integrity of Russia." Various legal steps were taken to prevent the development of the Ukrainian language and literature, otherwise it would be "a solid foundation for the development of a belief in the possibility of realizing in the future [...] the separation of Ukraine from Russia"<sup>17</sup> - it was believed.

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<sup>12</sup> К. Затюлин, *История 48-го года уже сделана, а история 2018–19–20 будет делаться с нашим участием!* 1 ноября 2018, <https://zatulin.ru/konstantin-zatulin-istoriya-48-go-goda-uzhe-sdelana-a-istoriya-2018-19-20-budet-delatsya-s-nashim-uchastiem/>, access: 23 IX 2023.

<sup>13</sup> *Путінський улюбленець Міхалков пояснив, чому українська мова для Росії – катастрофа*, Главком, <https://glavcom.ua/world/observe/putinskij-uljublennets-mikhalkov-pojasniv-ukrajinska-mova-dlja-rosiji-katastrofa-870723.html>, access: 23 IX 2023.

<sup>14</sup> *На Луганщині окупанти спалюють українські книги*, LB.ua, 5 II 2023, [https://lb.ua/society/2023/02/05/544861\\_luganshchini\\_okupanti\\_spalyuyut.html](https://lb.ua/society/2023/02/05/544861_luganshchini_okupanti_spalyuyut.html), access: 23 IX 2023.

<sup>15</sup> *Росія влаштувала на окупованих територіях лінгвоцид української мови – мовний омбудсмен*, Radio Svoboda, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-linhvotsyd-ukrayinskoyi-movy-ombudsmen/31919813.html>, access: 23 IX 2023.

<sup>16</sup> М. Тимошик, *Історія видавничої справи*, Київ: Наша культура і наука, 2007, р. 243.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

The Ukrainian language, along with culture and ethnicity, has been seen as a constitutive attribute of the Ukrainian nation throughout history. While in Western Europe the nation was identified with the state, and thus national belonging was identical with civic belonging, the Ukrainian nation, deprived of its own state, was conceived as a linguistic-cultural-ethnic community, in which language was the most visible distinguishing feature of identity. In the history of the Ukrainian nation, the struggle for the national language became a metaphor for the struggle for state independence<sup>18</sup>. Expanding on the thought of historian Orest Subtelny, it can be said that whenever Ukrainians defended the right to preserve their national identity, "the main 'front line' ran along the language issue"<sup>19</sup>.

The situation is similar in the ongoing war. According to the director of the Ukrainian Language Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Pavlo Hrycenko, "[f]ront of language is today the main front of the struggle for an independent Ukraine"<sup>20</sup>. In his view, the Ukrainian authorities can import, buy or rent weapons to fight the invaders, but the language and historical past cannot be borrowed from anyone<sup>21</sup>.

## CHANGES IN PERCEPTION OF LANGUAGES

The large-scale invasion has made tectonic shifts in Ukrainian citizens' perceptions of the meaning of languages and radically changed the linguistic landscape of Ukraine<sup>22</sup>. The vast majority of Ukrainian citizens prefer the Ukrainian language, and consider linguistic rights to be one of the key factors of their own dignity and actively respond to its violation. Discussions about the introduction of a second state language in Ukraine are a thing of the past, and the state language is seen by citizens as an element of stability for the entire nation. The process of derusification and decolonization in Ukraine has accelerated rapidly, as a significant number of Ukrainian citizens have abandoned communication in Russian.

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<sup>18</sup> „The battle for Ukrainian language, traced across centuries of Ukraine's interaction with its more powerful neighbors, has ultimately become a metaphor for the struggle of independent Ukraine itself, locked in a hybrid war with Russia with no end in sight” (M. S. Flier and A. Graziosi, *Introduction [in:] The Battle for Ukrainian: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. by M. S. Flier and A. Graziosi, Harvard UP, 2017, p. 12).

<sup>19</sup> О. Субтельний, *Україна: історія*, пер. з англ. Ю. Шевчука, «Либідь», Київ 1991, р. 452.

<sup>20</sup> Професор Павло Гриценко: У тих, хто працює проти української мови, змінилася тактика, Главком, <https://glavcom.ua/interviews/profesor-pavlo-hrytsenko-u-tikh-khto-pratsjuje-proti-ukrajinskoji-movi-zminilasja-taktika-966106.html>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Кремінський Т., *Війна кардинально змінила мовний ландшафт України*, LB.ua, 9 X 2023, [https://lb.ua/blog/taras\\_kremen/578618\\_viyna\\_kardinalno\\_zminila\\_movniy.html?fbclid=IwAR0NmMQIW20aXF62OLB9BdyzA\\_t8Dova8IXLN-ile\\_Uhzr0vRr978sgbell](https://lb.ua/blog/taras_kremen/578618_viyna_kardinalno_zminila_movniy.html?fbclid=IwAR0NmMQIW20aXF62OLB9BdyzA_t8Dova8IXLN-ile_Uhzr0vRr978sgbell), access: 23 IX 2023.

According to research, since the large-scale invasion, 58% of the Ukrainians always or mostly speak Ukrainian on a daily basis, 15% speak Russian, 24% equally communicate in both languages<sup>23</sup>. In 2017, the numbers were 49%, 26% and 25%, respectively. Even in the east and south of Ukraine, for the first time in the history of the survey, Ukrainian is spoken no less than Russian (29% vs. 27%). At home, 50% of respondents communicate with their families only in Ukrainian, mostly in Ukrainian - 12%, in both languages equally - 19%, only or mostly in Russian - 16%, in other languages - 2%. This is a significant change from 2017, when 51% spoke only or mainly Ukrainian, and 25% only or mainly Russian<sup>24</sup>. 58% of Ukrainian citizens do not consider the Russian language important. 80% of the Ukrainians believe that Ukrainian should be the main language in all spheres of communication, 15% favor a bilingual country, less than 1% favor the dominance of Russian. This means that there is a broad social consensus on the language issue in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian language has become part of the struggle for survival, a kind of uniform that allows you to distinguish your own from the outsider. As an important linguistic ombudsman puts it, "occupiers do not distinguish Ukrainian and speak with an accent. That's why state languages are our leading line of defense"<sup>25</sup>. In the first instance of a large-scale invasion, when the aggressor claimed Kiev, Ukrainian citizens saw that the Ukrainian language can help ensure security, quick and effective communication in a language little understood by the enemy is crucial to protect people's lives and health. Words in Ukrainian, such as *паляниця*, appeared to be nearly the only tool available instantly to recognize diversions<sup>26</sup>. The National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine published a list of words in Ukrainian that are helpful in detecting

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<sup>23</sup> В. Кулик, *Мова та ідентичність в Україні на кінець 2022-го*, Zbruc̃, [https://zbruc.eu/node/114247?fbclid=IwAR0v60\\_zNeNu2egSGfLniSzcU2UU9m4R30K-TMyhyglQxz-4xFsaaYYLeok](https://zbruc.eu/node/114247?fbclid=IwAR0v60_zNeNu2egSGfLniSzcU2UU9m4R30K-TMyhyglQxz-4xFsaaYYLeok), access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> The post on the official Facebook network profile dated March 1, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/taras.kremin>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Скажи "паляниця": у ЗСУ розповіли, як відрізнити окупанта, <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/skazhi-palyanicya-u-zsu-rozpovili-yak-vidrizniti-okupanta-1988047.html>, access 23 IX 2023.

Russian diversionists<sup>27</sup>. In addition, numerous examples prove that the Ukrainian language saves the lives of soldiers<sup>28</sup> at the front and gives a sense of security to the wounded<sup>29</sup>.

Director of the Ukrainian Language Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine Pavlo Hrycenko noted that the Ukrainian language has become a powerful unifying factor for all Ukrainians, even if some of them do not speak the language on a daily basis. Ukrainian citizens no longer separate the concept of the Ukrainian language from Ukraine itself, merging the two into one. "This unity is now extremely powerful, and it is this unity that is influencing the visible transformation of the language code throughout our country"<sup>30</sup>.

## THE LETTER OF THE ALPHABET AS AN EMBODIMENT OF UKRAINIAN IDENTITY AND A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE

In Ukraine's war against Russia, symbols are important, one of which has become the thirteenth letter of the Ukrainian alphabet - the letter *ї* [Yi]. Its uniqueness is attributed to the fact that it does not appear in any other language based on the Cyrillic alphabet. This letter is a distinctive symbol of Ukrainian identity, as it is found both in the name of the country in the national language - *Україна*, as well as in the name of its capital - *Київ*. In addition, the letter *ї* is also in the name of the nation - *українці* - and in the slogan of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which has become an expression of support for Ukraine around the world - *Слава Україні!*

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<sup>27</sup> Не лише "паляниця": у РНБО дали пораду, як швидко визначити окупанта чи диверсанта, Obozrevatel, <https://war.obozrevatel.com/ukr/ne-lishe-palyanitsya-u-rnbo-dali-poradu-yak-shvidko-viznachiti-okupanta-chi-diversanta.htm>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Українська мова на фронті рятує життя в прямому сенсі, - Віталій Овчаренко, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifWsqnJ2oTQ>; Як мова рятує життя на фронті – Павло Вишебаба, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gESQjftI19I>; Свої. Як українська мова рятує життя, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJr-v-E\\_GZw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJr-v-E_GZw); Мова має значення. Мова рятує життя. Говори українською! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plSNYN3OCsw>; Роль мови на війні, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG3VAyqt9P8>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Коли боєць у шоковому стані, треба розмовляти українською. На російську починають стріляти, „Аргумент”, <https://argumentua.com/stati/koli-bo-ts-u-shokovomu-stan-treba-rozmovlyati-ukra-nskoyu-na-ros-isku-pochinayut-str-lyati>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Павло Гриценко: "Хто себе шанує, має зробити все, щоб його мовне довілля не пропало", Українське радіо, 10 XI 2022, <http://www.nrcu.gov.ua/news.html?newsID=100058>, access 23 IX 2023.



This particular letter of the Ukrainian alphabet has its own monument<sup>31</sup> and minisculpture<sup>32</sup> in Ukraine. Additionally, an art festival<sup>33</sup> was dedicated to it, featuring a poem entitled 'Candle of the Letter ĭ,' written by Ivan Malkovych<sup>34</sup>. One of the first to exploit the uniqueness of the letter ĭ was Ukrainian culturologist Taras Vozniak, who founded a literary and cultural magazine called *ĭ*<sup>35</sup> in Lviv in 1989 to combat the Soviet system.

The *Ukrainer* project, well-known in Ukraine and abroad, which introduces Ukrainians themselves and the world to the nation, history, culture and wealth of Ukraine, has this unique letter in its name. Other initiatives and organizations emerging in various countries concerning the spread of knowledge about Ukraine also have the Ukrainian letter in the English-language name of the country. One such example is *Vision Ukraine*<sup>36</sup>, an interdisciplinary research network on Ukraine and Ukrainians in Europe. The research covers areas such as education, language and migration, with the goal of disseminating knowledge. Another example - *Ukrainian House in Hamburg*, which also uses this spelling in its name: *Ukraine Haus in Hamburg*<sup>37</sup> or the name of a travel company - *Explore Ukraine*<sup>38</sup>. The spelling of the country's name Ukraine in the Latin alphabet using the Cyrillic letter ĭ instead of i also appears in the titles of books about the country<sup>39</sup>. Some brands have promoted clothing, household items and jewelry with the letter ĭ, and a separate clothing brand "13th letter" has also appeared. To emphasize their self-identity, Ukrainians even get tattoos with this letter<sup>40</sup>.

The letter ĭ has become the epitome of Ukrainian identity and a symbol of independence. It is of great importance to Ukrainians precisely because it does not appear in the Russian alphabet, which is particularly important for emphasizing separateness. In occupied cities such

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<sup>31</sup> *Пам'ятник літері "ї" встановили на Тернопільщині*, LB.ua, 10 XI 2021, [https://lb.ua/culture/2021/11/10/498278\\_pamyatnik\\_literi\\_i\\_vstanovili.html](https://lb.ua/culture/2021/11/10/498278_pamyatnik_literi_i_vstanovili.html); *Рекордну букву «ї» поставили у Рівному*, ВолиньPost, 21 II 2013, <https://www.volynpost.com/news/11593-rekordnu-bukvu-i-postavyly-u-rivnomu-foto>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>32</sup> *У Києві відкрили мініскульптуру літери «ї»*, „Читомо”, 10 IX 2023, <https://chytomo.com/u-kyievi-vidkryly-miniskulpturu-literi-i/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>33</sup> *Фестиваль ĭ*, <https://tobm.org.ua/festyval-yi/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>34</sup> І. Малкович, *Свічка букви ĭ*, Бібліотека української літератури, <https://www.ukrlib.com.ua/books/printit.php?tid=5901>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>35</sup> *ĭ. Незалежний культурологічний часопис*, <https://www.ji.lviv.ua/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>36</sup> *Vision Ukraine*, [https://vision-ukraine.de/?fbclid=IwAR17JXi2G5jIAzNtROT41Cpe6\\_86zMMGcx-5kE6ZkS8k1jBRW4SywkQvbIY](https://vision-ukraine.de/?fbclid=IwAR17JXi2G5jIAzNtROT41Cpe6_86zMMGcx-5kE6ZkS8k1jBRW4SywkQvbIY), access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>37</sup> *Ukraine Haus in Hamburg*, <https://hilfe-ua.de/ukraine-haus-in-hamburg-de/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>38</sup> *Explore Ukraine*, <https://explore-ukraine.com/about/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g.: *Ukraine*, V&R unipress, 1. Auflage, 2024; *Brussels Ukraine Review*, 1st edition, ed. M. Barandiy, M. Stepanov, Promote Ukraine, Brussels 2019.

<sup>40</sup> «ĭ» — *більше, ніж літера*, *Ukrainer*, 16 V 2023, <https://ukrainer.net/litera-i/>, access 23 IX 2023.

as Mariupol, this Ukrainian letter is the epitome of hope for Ukraine's return. In various places in this predominantly Russian-speaking city, this letter began to appear<sup>41</sup>: on fences, building walls, sidewalks, squares, next to monuments (e.g. Taras Shevchenko) and others. In this way, the resistance movement, risking freedom and lives, brands Mariupol as a Ukrainian city and expresses opposition to the Russian occupation<sup>42</sup>. According to Mariupol Mayor's advisor Petro Andriushchenko, the appearance of the letter in various parts of the city caused shock to the occupying authorities, who initially did not understand why the letter was being spread and why it was being used as a symbol<sup>43</sup>.

Mariupol is not the only city where Ukrainians express their resentment and opposition to Russian aggressors with the letter 'I'. Graffiti with this Ukrainian letter is also appearing in the Kherson region, including towns such as Henichesk, Skadovsk, Berdyansk, and Novotroitsk. It is actively used by activists of the "Yellow Ribbon" civil resistance movement against the occupation (NB: the movement was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 2022). One of the activists of this movement explained<sup>44</sup> that using this letter was used to mark the places where the pseudo-referendum was held after the annexation of the occupied regions to Russia. The letter embodied an appeal to residents to boycott the referendum<sup>45</sup>. In the town of Henichesk, pro-Ukrainian activists distributed blue leaflets with the yellow letter 'I' - the colors of the Ukrainian flag - and the inscription "We will not allow the referendum. Henichesk - this is Ukraine"<sup>46</sup>. The Yellow Ribbon movement's website includes an appeal: "Use it [the letter] anywhere. The letter "I" is unique, as is Ukraine the only one of its kind in the world. The more the letter "I", the more in the occupier's understanding that Ukraine will always fight for its lands"<sup>47</sup>. Opposition

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<sup>41</sup> У Маріуполі літера «І» стала символом спротиву - її малюють у різних куточках міста, Ukrinform, 5 IX 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3565028-u-mariupoli-litera-i-stala-simvol-sprotivu-ii-maluut-u-riznih-kutockah-mista.html>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>42</sup> "I" як знак незалежності: активісти руху спротиву малюють українську літеру в тимчасово окупованому Маріуполі, Еспресо, <https://espresso.tv/i-yak-znak-nezalezhnosti-aktivisti-rukhu-sprotivu-malyuyut-ukrainsku-literu-v-timchasovo-okupovanomu-mariupoli>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>43</sup> I, I, I... Українське підпілля літерою «І» бореться з Росією на окупованих територіях, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ukrayina-rosiya-viyana-okupatsiya-mova-litera-yi/32083789.html>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Учасники руху спротиву доказують, що Скадовськ, Генічеськ та Новотроїцьке – Україна, Suspilne, 26 VII 2023, <https://suspilne.media/536649-obstrili-tokarivki-ta-komisan-ocikuvaniy-vrozaj-kavuniv-518-den-vijni-hronika-podij-v-hersonskij-oblasti/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Жовта стрічка та літера «І». Інтерв'ю з координатором руху опору в Херсоні, The Village, 25 XI 2022, <https://www.village.com.ua/village/city/city-experience/333237-zhovta-strichka-ta-litera-yi-interv-yu-z-koordinatom-ruhu-oporu-v-hersoni>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>46</sup> I, I, I... Українське підпілля літерою «І» бореться з Росією на окупованих територіях, op.cit.

<sup>47</sup> I проти Z, Жовта стрічка, <https://www.zhovtastrichka.org/>, access 23 IX 2023.

to the forced issuance of Russian ID cards to Ukrainian citizens under occupation was also symbolized by the letter ĭ<sup>48</sup>.

Another manifestation of resistance is that Ukrainians under occupation draw the letter ĭ on Russian occupied cars marked with the letter Z<sup>49</sup>. In addition, yellow and blue posters with the words "ĭ contra Z" appear in occupied towns. According to Taras Vozniak, in this letter-symbol war, ĭ's strength lies in the fact that it is a Ukrainian letter, while the occupiers use a letter of the Latin alphabet. Ukrainian writer Dmytro Kapranov is convinced that by using the letter of their alphabet to fight the aggressor, Ukrainians thus accentuate that "the Ukrainian language is also a weapon and can fight"<sup>50</sup>.

As First Lady Olena Zelenska noted, Ukrainian resonates with the world as a language of resistance and perseverance. Unlike Russian, which not only for the citizens of Ukraine, but also beyond its borders is associated with the language of aggression, brutality and cruelty, the Ukrainian language is the language of humanity, the language of culture, of opposing modern barbarism<sup>51</sup>.

## SUMMARY

For Ukraine, the war with Russia is a period of fierce struggle for territorial unity and independence, for the recovery of occupied territories, as well as for the right to its own language which is the foundation of national identity. The Ukrainian language today in Ukraine stands for independence, which is why the symbolic function of the Ukrainian language has become so important, as it represents independence, identity, unshakable faith of victory.

In the struggle for their separateness, Ukrainian citizens, both Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking, use the language of the titular nation as a tool in the fight for their freedom. The Ukrainian language is both a symbol and an instrument of defiance against the invaders. In occupied cities in the southeast of Ukraine, the underground resistance movement has adopted the unique letter of the Ukrainian alphabet, which includes the name of the country

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<sup>48</sup> *Антипаспортизація, Жовта стрічка*, <https://www.zhovtastrichka.org/>, access 23 IX 2023.

<sup>49</sup> *Жовта стрічка та літера «ĭ»*, *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> *ĭ, ĭ, ĭ... Українське підпілля літерою «ĭ» бореться з Росією на окупованих територіях*, *op.cit.*

<sup>51</sup> *Українська мова звучить у світі як мова опору та стійкості. Як мова людяності – на протипагу агресії. І як мова культури – на протипагу сучасному варварству*, - Олена Зеленська, <https://www.vin.gov.ua/news/ostanni-novyny/53196-ukrainska-mova-zvuchyt-u-sviti-iak-mova-oporu-ta-stiikosti-yak-mova-liudianosti-na-protyvahu-ahresii-i-iak-mova-kultury-na-protyvahu-suchasnomu-varvarstvu-olena-zelenska>, access 23 IX 2023.

in the national language (Україна) and the capital (Київ), as a kind of symbol of struggle. Activists paint the letter І on walls, sidewalks, monuments and other public places, risking repression and loss of freedom or even their lives.

In occupied localities in the Donetsk and Kherson regions, for the Ukrainian community the letter "ї" has become a linguistic symbol of longing for independence and a source of mobilization, consolidation and manifestation of their separateness from the occupying power. The Ukrainian language represented by this letter reflects resistance to attempts to impose Russian cultural and political domination.

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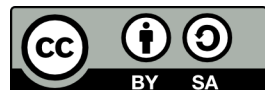
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