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The language biography of Lesya Ukrainka in the historical and cultural context as a case of decolonization

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Мовна біографія Лесі Українки в історичному і культурному контексті як приклад деколонізації

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АНОТАЦІЯ. Сучасна лінгвістична наука активно послуговується методом мовної біографії. Центральне місце цей метод посідає у глотодидактиці, студіях багатомовності, діалектології, міграційних дослідженнях *etc*. У пропонованій статті метод мовної біографії застосований

у рамці колоніальних студій. Метою дослідження є сконструювати мовну біографію Лесі Українки на основі автобіографічної інформації, листування, спогадів рідних, беручи до уваги широкий історичний, культурний та політичний контекст місця і соціуму її народження, життя і творчості, з особливою увагою до родинного чинника. У підсумку, вперше сконструйована мовна біографія Лесі Українки засвідчила відмову від персональної мовної стратегії імперського типу, де мова імперії безальтернативно повинна бути детермінативною або єдиною мовою індивіда; виявила зворотну динаміку, в якій мова колонізованого набула центрального значення, перетворюючи мову колонізатора на одну з багатьох мов багатомовного світу. Загалом, мовна біографія Лесі Українки виходить за межі колоніальної мовної матриці; є підґрунтям комунікативних стратегій, які охоплюють багато мов; перетворює українську мову на лінгвістичний маркер деколонізації.

Ключові слова: Леся Українка, мовна біографія, мовна політика, комунікативна стратегія, багатомовність, ідентичність, деколонізація, лінгвістичний маркер

Biografia językowa Łesi Ukrainki w kontekście historycznym i kulturowym jako przypadek dekolonizacji

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STRESZCZENIE. Współczesne językoznawstwo aktywnie posługuje się metodą biografii językowej. Metoda ta zajmuje centralne miejsce w glottodydaktyce, studiach wielojęzyczności, dialektologii, badaniach migracyjnych itp. W proponowanym artykule metoda biografii językowej została zastosowana w zakresie studiów nad kolonializmem. Celem badania jest skonstruowanie biografii językowej Łesi Ukrainki na podstawie informacji autobiograficznych, korespondencji, wspomnień bliskich, uwzględniającej szeroki kontekst historyczny, kulturowy i polityczny miejsca i społeczności, w której poetka urodziła się, żyła i tworzyła, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem czynnika rodzinnego. Po raz pierwszy skonstruowana biografia językowa Łesi Ukrainki ukazała odejście od osobistej strategii językowej typu imperialnego, w której język imperium miał być jedynym i determinującym językiem jednostki; ujawniła odwrotną dynamikę, w której język kolonizowanego zyskał centralne znaczenie, przekształcając język kolonizatora w jeden z wielu języków wielojęzycznego świata. Zasadniczo, biografia językowa Łesi Ukrainki wychodzi poza ramy kolonialnej matrycy językowej; jest podstawą strategii komunikacyjnych obejmujących wiele języków; przekształca język ukraiński w lingwistyczny marker dekolonizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Łesia Ukrainka, biografia językowa, polityka językowa, strategia komunikacyjna, wielojęzyczność, tożsamość, dekolonizacja, marker lingwistyczny

Background

On the eve of the Great War, a notable cultural and intellectual event took place in Ukraine: a series of presentations of Yaroslav Hrytsak's book *Overcoming the Past: A Global History of Ukraine* [Грицак 2021]. Through its own perspective, this history offered readers a "chance to better understand" themselves. Rereading history to overcome the past is only part of the condition for moving into the future. Another aspect is to narrate the story from the perspective of the other, who is the former colonized [Thompson 2000]. Lesya Ukrainka's language biography is the story of a colonized individual overcoming colonization, and she does so long before the fall of the colony.

The Ancient Greek *βίος* 'life' and *γραφω* 'write' formed the lexeme 'biography', common in almost all Indo-European languages, meaning a person's life reproduced in words. Accordingly, the 'language biography' represents one person's life and experience related to language. Linguists consistently consider the language biography to be case study method, the subject of which "can be an individual, a phenomenon, a group of people, or an organization. The purpose of a case study is to provide a detailed description of the person, object, or phenomenon under study, examining it from various perspectives and considering its different aspects" [Miodunka 2016: 51].

Language biography may refer to living individuals or to those who lived long before the biographical description and investigation. When it comes to living persons, the language biography is compiled based on live communication with the individual. Such communication must adhere to clear requirements, encompassing openness, trust, mutual contact, interpersonal interactions, and naturalness. The researcher should remember that individuals choose and interpret their own experiences based on previous knowledge and personal backgrounds [Miodunka 2016].

When it comes to individuals who lived long before the beginning of the research, the linguistic biography is constructed based on autobiographical and biographical data, personal correspondence, and memories of relatives, primarily contemporaries. It is essential to ensure the authenticity of these materials, preventing them from being subjected to ideological alterations, tendentious editing, or significant abridgment. Additionally, it is important to consider: 1) the broader social, historical, cultural, and political context in which the individual lived and acted; 2) the family context; and 3) self-reflection, especially when the subject of research is a prominent cultural figure of a specific historical period.

The language biography of Lesya Ukrainka originates within an aristocratic family in the second half of the 19th century in the colonized Ukrainian part of the Russian Empire under the rule of the Romanov family. When viewed through the prism of the 'centre-periphery' paradigm, the colonial centre was supposed to dominate culturally and linguistically, while the colonized periphery was supposed to comply, orient itself towards, and mimic the centre. Language played a key role in this dichotomy. The colonizer typically did not adopt the language of the colonized. However, Lesya Ukrainka's language biography, as well as her communicative life strategies in general, exemplifies a reverse dynamic, wherein the language of the colonized assumes centrality, relegating the language of the colonizer to just one among many others. Consequently, Lesya Ukrainka's language biography transcends the colonial language matrix, where the empire's language holds sway, and instead proposes a language matrix dominated by the Ukrainian language. The destruction of the imperial matrix is reinforced by the practice of translating outstanding works of Western authors into Ukrainian. Such a shift in direction from the East to the West serves as a marker of cultural reorientation from a quasi-enlightened world to an educated one.

The **purpose** of this article is to construct a language biography of Lesya Ukrainka based on the writer's biography, her correspondence, and memories of relatives, taking into consideration both the broad historical, cultural, and political context of her place of birth and society, as well as the narrower but highly influential family context. It aims to demonstrate how the entire structure of Lesya Ukrainka's language biography is built upon inverted subordination, where the Ukrainian language is at the centre, refusing to submit to the colonial language. Aspects such as language behaviour, language personality, code-switching, the author's language, or the language of her texts are not within the scope of our attention.

Language biography as a method

Scholars generally agree that the language biography method was established by the end of the 20th century [Кісс, Шумицька 2023]. According to Flubacher Mi-Cha and Purkarthofer Judith, the main idea of this method is "rather than focusing on languages per se, researchers are interested in speakers and how they conceive of, live with, experience, dream of languages and whatever it is they consider as language(s)" [Mi-Cha and Purkarthofer 2022]. From the late 1960s and early 1970s until the beginning of the 21st century, narratives about events or experiences linked to personal life became the subject of interdisciplinary humanitarian studies. The growing scholarly interest in minorities and migration processes, with a particular emphasis on language(s), gradually led to the development of the language

biography phenomenon. Consequently, step by step, personal narratives and their examination shaped the reality of language biography.

The method of language biographical approaches proved successful in dialectology, language teaching, multilingualism, as well as in language planning and policy. Władysław Miodunka draws attention to the method of language biography and its applicability in various linguistic studies. He remarks thus: "Language biography is a method of research that is increasingly used not only in studies in the field of linguistic contacts and bilingualism, but also in the speech therapy, description and analysis of the Polish language used by individuals outside our country or in studies of the process of creating an individual linguistic consciousness" [Miodunka 2016: 50].

The method of language biography has been examined and employed in research by Aneta Pavlenko [Pavlenko 2007], Rita Franceschini [Franceschini 2001, 2022], Jiří Nekvapil [Nekvapil 2003], Anna Verschik [Verschik 2002], Władysław Miodunka [Miodunka 2016, 2023], Helena Krasowska [Krasowska 2022, 2023], Bronisława Ligara [Ligara 2010], Katarzyna Dzierżawin [Dzierżawin 2009], Iryna Braha [Брага 2014], Nadia Kiss and Halyna Shumytska [Кісс, Шумицька 2023], among others.

The Polish-Ukrainian linguistic tradition became familiar with this method in the 1950s. Przemysław Zwoliński was the first to propose the term 'language biography' as 'życiorys językowy' [see Zwoliński 1970: 165]. Subsequently, he elaborated on this term in articles about the language biographies of Taras Shevchenko [Zwoliński 1964] and Ivan Kotliarevsky [Zwoliński 1970].

According to Przemysław Zwoliński, "the writer's language biography should be understood as a set of facts that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the specifics of the author's language. We are talking about the writer's dialect or a regional environment in childhood, his/her education, knowledge of foreign languages, cultural contacts, especially literary ones, and travel, etc." [Zwoliński 1970: 165].

Orest Tkachenko first analysed Taras Shevchenko's language biography in his publication *Shevchenko and Languages* in 1989 [Ткаченко 1989]. Nevertheless, the method of language biography has not been developed in Ukrainian studies. During the Soviet period, telling or sharing an authentic story about oneself and one's languages was dangerous and could lead to persecution. Language biographies were expected to prioritize the Russian language at the centre of the narrative. If such a model was not adhered to, it was better not to write at all. After the collapse of the USSR, the disciplines in which the method of language biography was decisive ended up on the periphery of scientific research. Linguists paid far more attention to the language behaviour, language personality, and language portrait [see Мозер 2012; Загнітко et al., 2017].

Studies of bi- and multilingualism, and case studies are the cornerstones of this approach, and the expansion of the method's application is evident in its use in colonial studies as well.

Historical and Socio-Cultural Context of Lesya Ukrainka's life

Lesya Ukrainka was both a speaker and creator of the modern Ukrainian language. Seventy-six years before her birth in 1871, Volhynia (her birthplace) was the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the three partitions of Poland, "the greatest beneficiary was Russia, whose share of the loot included the Baltic provinces, Lithuania, western Belarus, and, in Ukraine, Volhynia with the towns of Rivne and Lutsk" [Plokhy 2016: 145].

Volhynia became a part of the eastern empire at the end of the 18th century. By the middle of the 19th century, it had become Volhynia province and, together with the Kyiv and Poltava provinces, formed the South-Western Territory (Yugo--Zapadny Krai). *De jure* being a part of the Russian Empire, de facto "until the Polish uprising of 1830–1831, this territory remained a field of Polish political and cultural influences. These influences even reached Kyiv, where the language of intellectual life had long been Polish" [Грицак 2022: 40].

The Russian culture was in its pre-industrial period during Volhynia's incorporation into the empire. Religion prevailed as a factor of identity over a nearly marginal linguistic one. From a religious perspective, the Russian elites were cosmopolitan, displaying religious diversity (including Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, or Buddhist beliefs). The lower classes, predominantly peasants, inhabited traditional communities that were religiously homogeneous. From a linguistic standpoint, Andreas Kappeler divided all the languages of the Russian Empire at that time into two subgroups: "on the one hand, there were languages which were spoken and written by the upper class, […] and on the other, there were non-written languages, which were only spoken by the lower classes, who were ruled by elites from another ethnic group" [Kappeler 2001: 150]. For the most part, both the upper and lower classes were bilingual, each using their everyday colloquial language and sacred language according to the situation. The Empire legitimized languages such as Polish, German, Swedish, Greek, Armenian, Mongolian, Hebrew, and Yiddish, as well as Volga Tatar, Crimean Tatar, and Arabic, as separate entities. Additionally, it recognized separate dialects spoken by Latvian, Estonian, and Finnish peasants [Kappeler 2001: 150].

The language of Ukrainians was not taken into consideration. Old Ukrainian faded away, and the modern Ukrainian language began to come into view and assert itself. In 1798, the first text in the new Ukrainian language appeared. It was the text of Ivan Kotlyarevsky's travesty of *Aeneid*. Taras Shevchenko's work, *Kobzar*, marked

the culmination of the process – the birth of the modern Ukrainian literary language in 1840. However, after 23 years, this language was banned.

During the second half of the 19th century, non-Russian populations were subjected to a policy of forced integration in the western regions of the empire. This policy, implemented through cultural and linguistic russification, had a profound impact on Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians. The only difference in russification practices was that Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians were considered part of the Great Russian people, while Poles were viewed as enemies from whom 'western Russians' had to be protected [see Kappeler 2001: 247–285]. This difference manifested itself in the language issue. While the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian languages were regarded as dialects and outright banned, the Polish language, though not officially prohibited, encountered severe restrictions on its usage and was gradually supplanted by Russian.

> The intensity with which the various ethnic groups of the Russian Empire were subjected to standardization and integration can be summed up on the basis of a rough-and-ready scale. The Ukrainians and Belarusians were subjected to the greatest pressure: their elite had been largely integrated and they were deemed to be Russians. For this reason their national aspirations were considered to be apostasy from the Russian nation. On the second level were Orthodox non-Russians, who on account of their common faith also belonged to Russiandom in a wider sense of the word: the Romanians of Bessarabia, the Greek and Bulgarian colonists, the Georgians, and the baptized animists and Muslims. On the other hand, the Poles were clearly not Russians, nor could they be transformed into Russians. However, they were deemed to be enemies and traitors who had to be punished by means of severe repression and forced integration. For a long time the Lithuanians were placed in the same category as the Poles [Kappeler 2001: 277–278].

The symbols of cultural and linguistic russification of Ukrainians are the secret Valuev Circular of 1863 and the Ems Decree of 1876. The Valuev Circular stated that "a separate Little Russian language never existed, does not exist, and shall not exist, and the dialect used by commoners (i.e. Ukrainian) is nothing but Russian corrupted by the influence of Poland"[1]. The Ems Decree supplemented the Valuev Circular and remained valid until 1905. According to Yaroslav Hrytsak, 1.4 million Ukrainians were russified in the Empire from 1860 to 1890, and "the higher Ukrainians were on the social ladder, the more they were affected by the russification" [Грицак 2022: 183]. However, there were some exceptions. Despite belonging to the upper classes of the Empire, the Kosach and Drahomanov families adopted a language strategy that demonstrated a non-Russification character; moreover, it embodied a decolonization ideology. Statelessness was the reason why no official language policy or language planning could be formed for Ukrainian. This situa-

[1] „[…] Никакого особенного малороссийского языка не было, нет и быть не может, и что наречие их, употребляемое простонародьем, есть тот же русский язык, испорченный влиянием на него Польши […]".

tion forced nationally conscious elites to assume the functions of the state in the realm of language.

The writer's family world determined her language biography

Lesya Ukrainka, also known as Larysa Kosach, was born between two major bans on the modern Ukrainian language. Ukrainian was her native and primary language, both functionally and chronologically. She created modern Ukrainian literature in this language. In the Empire, during a period of its cultural and linguistic unification, it was by no means expected for Ukrainian to become the central language in the construction of her linguistic biography as a child of nobility. The general historical and sociocultural context of the writer's life had considerable influence, but the family context held much greater importance – indeed, it determined the repertoire of languages and structure of the writer's language biography, as well as her life communicative strategies.

Petro Kosach, an active state councillor[2], and Olha Kosach[3] were Lesya's parents. Both parents came from aristocratic and educated families. Lesia Ukrainka's father graduated from the Chernihiv Classical Male Gymnasium and the Faculty of Law of St. Volodymyr's University in Kyiv. He began his career at the Kyiv Chamber of the Criminal Court. Upon completing his dissertation, he was appointed assistant to the Governor of the Chancellery in the Department of Justice and as Secretary of Peasant Affairs of the Present in the Kyiv Governorate in 1865. In 1866, Kosach was assigned to Novohrad-Volynskyi to assume the position of chairman of the Congress of Peace Mediators. Later, he held a similar position in Kovel. In 1902, he was transferred to Kyiv, where he served as a civil servant with special duties in peasant affairs under the Governor General of Kyiv, Podolia, and Volhynia. Petro Kosach, as his daughter Olha recalls, "knew how to speak only one language – Russian. [...] He understood the Ukrainian language perfectly, and we, his children, always spoke in Ukrainian, and we also wrote letters to him only in Ukrainian, because in general no other language was used in the family than Ukrainian" [Косач-Кривинюк 1970: 885]. However, as a graduate of the gymnasium and the university, he was familiar with Latin and Greek, French, and German, also Church Slavonic.

Olha Kosach graduated from the Boarding School of Noble Maidens in Kyiv. She was a publisher, writer, ethnographer, interpreter, and civil activist, the first female corresponding member of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Furthermore, Olha Kosach was the sister of Professor Mykhailo Drahomanov, mentioned by Emperor Alexander II in the eleventh point of the Ems Decree. The language biography of Olha Kosach is distinguished by her exceptional proficiency in German, French,

[2] A civil rank in the Russian Empire that conferred the right to hereditary nobility.

[3] Better known by her pen name Olena Pchilka.

Polish, Russian, Latin, Ancient Greek, and Church Slavonic languages. Nevertheless, Ukrainian served as her functionally primary language, despite its official classification as a dialect of the Russian language in the latter half of the 19th century. Olha Kosach prioritized Ukrainian as the foundation for raising her children and as the cornerstone of her family language policy [see Shevchuk-Kliuzheva 2023].

The mother chose exclusively Ukrainian as the first language for her children, primarily for her eldest son Mykhailo and daughter Lesya. Practically the same age (there was one-year difference between the siblings), they grew up in a linguistically isolated world, where "children's societies were almost non-existent for them: the exclusivity of their Ukrainian orientation did not allow them to expand their circle of acquaintances" [Олена Пчілка 2017: 25]. Olha Kosach describes her educational linguistic strategy as follows:

> The children did not go anywhere to schools. The children did not attend any schools. At the time, it seemed to me that sending them to school would destroy my efforts to raise them in the Ukrainian language. The fear was useless, because I soon realized that if children are proficient in Ukrainian, the school does not annihilate this language. […] While living in Zviahel, I took the children to the countryside […] to ensure they wouldn't lose their language. The decision was also due to the fact that when I was abroad, they took a Russian nanny, a former serf. She spoke only Russian and had a negative impact on the children's Ukrainian language skills. However, this influence quickly passed [Олена Пчілка 2017: 29–30].

Olena Pchilka's strategies for teaching her own children formed the basis of Ukrainian national upbringing. She is considered a pioneer "in the field of national education of Ukrainian children" [Косач-Кривинюк 1970: 889]. As a result, Ukrainian become a linguistic marker of decolonization.

Lesya Ukrainka and her languages

Lesya Ukrainka belonged to the second generation of Ukrainian intellectuals, who shaped modern Ukrainian language, literature, and culture during the first century of their existence, amidst the unification of the empire and the eradication of linguistic and cultural differences of colonized peoples. Contrary to imperial colonization strategies and practices, Ukrainian was a deterministic language for Lesya Ukrainka. Ten other languages, listed in the order of acquisition rather than importance – Russian, Polish, Church Slavonic, Ancient Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, English, Bulgarian, as well as Sanskrit and ancient Egyptian – formed her linguistic identity.

Her natural language environment was shaped by the family language, predominantly Ukrainian, and southwestern dialects of Ukrainian, particularly the Volhynia dialect. "In Kolodiazhne, we were surrounded by Volhynia, one might say, from all sides. It is not surprising that Lesya learned this Volhynia dialect and then used it

so successfully in her works" [Олена Пчілка 2017: 30], thus enriching the modern Ukrainian language and literature. Also, children were only reading adult books in Ukrainian, such as *People's South Russia Tale* [Народныя Южнорусскія Сказки] by Ivan Rudchenko, *The Works of Ethnographic and Statistical Expedition to the Western Russian Region* [Труды этнографическо-статистической экспедиции в Западно-Русский Край] by Pavlo Chubynskyi, and translations of *Serbian Folk Songs* [Сербські народні пісні]. Family language, immersion in a natural dialectal environment, and reading books in Ukrainian greatly contributed to the formation of Lesia Ukrainka's Ukrainian language.

Self-assessment and external evaluation of the language behaviour of the Kosachs' children and their social circle were different. Self-perception, despite the awareness of external disapproval, was positive. Lesya's sister Olha recalls a visit to her brother Mykhailo in Kholm, where he studied at the Kholm Gymnasium with "a Galician fellow, Bachynsky, the son of a Galician priest. He (except for our Misha, **of course**), spoke 'organically' Ukrainian [...]. We were both surprised and pleased to hear this, because we were accustomed to the fact of being the only 'white crows' among the children of the intelligentsia" [Косач-Кривинюк 1970: 56]. By contrast, the perception of Ukrainian-speaking children was extremely negative in the upper circles of society at that time. Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska (childhood friend of Lesya Ukrainka) writes "among the Kyiv quasi-intelligentsia of Russian origin [...] there were unfavorable attitudes towards everything Ukrainian, especially towards the 'Ukrainophiles' themselves; at best, these were disdainful attitudes, as if towards 'blissful idiots'" [Старицька-Черняхівська 2000: 663].

Her language biography begins with Ukrainian, and then comes Russian. Russian was the language of communication of her father and father's sisters. At the age of eight, Lesya Ukrainka was already able to read in Russian. She was proficient in this language, writing scientific and journalistic texts, corresponding, translate, but openly disliked it, referring to it as «katsapshchyna». Probably, simultaneously with Russian, Polish appears in her repertoire of languages, acquired in a natural environment in Volhynia, where Polish was one of the three most widespread languages alongside Ukrainian and Yiddish. In 1890, Lesya Ukrainka already included Polish in her language list, as evidenced by her letter: "Misha got me a translation of Heine's Lieder into Polish […]; I am sitting and checking it" [Леся Українка 2021: 101].

At the age of ten, together with her brother she began homeschooling according to the curriculum of a classical boys' gymnasium. During this time, she studied Latin and Ancient Greek. She also learned German and French with her mother. By the end of the 1880s, she had become familiar with Italian and planned to learn English, which she wrote to her uncle Mykhailo Drahomanov in 1889: "While in Odesa, I wanted to study English [...] but massage got in the way [...] I've already learned a little Italian myself" [Косач-Кривинюк 1970: 98]. A year later, in another letter to her uncle, she again mentioned the Italian language.

According to Lesia's letters, one can see that Italian does not pose any additional difficulties for her, but English, on the contrary, was a challenge: "English is very difficult, but I will still learn it" [Lesya Ukrainka 2021: 240]. Lesya continued to learn English until 1894 when she finally wrote to Mykhailo Drahomanov "my English language has finally settled in properly!" [Леся Українка 2021: 289]. While living in Sofia in 1894, she learned Bulgarian. As an educated person of her time Lesya read and understood Church Slavonic. Sanskrit and Ancient Egyptian were two languages from which she translated.

Lesya Ukrainka's mother, uncle Mykhailo Drahomanov, and the social environment which she had belonged to consciously and consistently shaped her language biography practically from birth. In the end, a complex multilingual biography of an extraordinary personality – a cultural symbol of an entire nation – emerged (see Table 1):

Table 1. The languages of Lesya Ukrainka

Year	Age	Language	Language type	Language acquisition manner
–	–	**Ukrainian**	first, primary functional	native
1875	4	started reading in Ukrainian		
1874	5	wrote her first letter in Ukrainian		
–	–	**Russian**	second, secondary functional	acquired
before 1879	7/8	already read in Russian		
–	–	**Polish**	frequently used in the area, functional language when she visited Poland	acquired
1887	12	translation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*, the verse *Vilia, That Our Streams Accepts*		
–	–	**Church Slavonic**	Dead	acquired
1882	11	**Ancient Greek**	Dead	learned
1882	11	**Latin**	Dead	learned
1882	11	**French**	foreign	learned
1882	11	**German**	foreign, functional language when she lived in Germany and Austria	learned
1888	17	**Italian**	foreign, functional language when she lived in Italy	learned
1889	18	**English**	foreign	learned
1894	23	**Bulgarian**	foreign, functional language when she lived in Bulgarian	learned
before 1890	18/19	**Sanskrit**	language of the texts she translated, using other known languages	familiar with
before 1910	38/39	**Ancient Egyptian**	language of the texts she translated, using other known languages	familiar with

Lesya Ukrainka constantly evaluated her language skills. She assesses them as good, mediocre, or very poor: "I don't know Bulgarian, I'm not used to speaking French, I don't want to speak in Moscow dialect (because I'm not used to it either) [...]. And write me your response in whichever of these four languages you want, or even all four at once, I will read it anyway"; "Let her write to me in any language she wants – I'll understand, though, of course, it would be more pleasant to speak in my own. I hope she'll forgive me for not responding in German, because the fact is, I don't know German well enough..." [see Lesya Ukrainka 2021]. Finally, she provides the most comprehensive self-analysis of her proficiency in various languages in a letter to Mykhailo Pavlyk in 1903:

> I know French and German much better than the 'top students' of various gymnasiums and institutes in Russia usually know them, both theoretically and practically, to the extent that I can write articles in these languages, as well as letters and even poems (I have translated German poems into blank verse). Speaking, whether in French or Russian, comes just as easily to me. Nowadays, I know Italian better than necessary, for instance, in a conservatory of singing; I speak it fluently enough to conduct business correspondence. I know English theoretically (after all, I can read aloud, not just with my eyes), and I can translate from it without using a dictionary. If I had Polish students, I would know enough Polish to explain during the lectures. I know Russian no less than any Ukrainian who attended Russian schools (although I did not attend them), but my pronunciation in Russian is worse than in French, which is characteristic of the Ukrainians, and I would be least inclined to teach this language. As for my Ukrainian, judge it for yourselves [Леся Українка 1979: 56–58].

Lesya Ukrainka's knowledge of languages had a utilitarian everyday character, on the one hand, and on the other, served as an instrument for creating modern Ukrainian literature, language, and therefore culture. She was fluent in Italian, German, Polish, Bulgarian, and Russian, which she used respectively for everyday communication in Italy, Germany, Austria, Poland, Bulgaria, Georgia, and the Crimea. From another hand, her linguistic aspirations were more ambitious: "I would like to know all the major European languages, at least for the sake of literature itself" [Леся Українка 2021: 194].

Conclusion

The Empire to which Lesya Ukrainka belonged and her entire sociocultural context demanded mastery of the Russian language. Russian was a prerequisite for a successful career, security, stability, and fame. The Ukrainian language did not offer any of these benefits. On the contrary, it significantly complicated life as the language of a colonized and disadvantaged people. However, due to the family language policy established by Olena Pchilka, Lesya's language biography revolves around the Ukrainian language. This language is central to her language biography, and simultaneously serves as the primary medium for her literary creativity. Her literary

works constitute the cornerstone of modern Ukrainian literature as an integral part of a unique culture. This culture serves as the foundation for emotional, intellectual, and ultimately political independence. While many other languages are components of the architecture of her language biography, none of them compete with Ukrainian and therefore cannot subjugate its speaker.

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