

Teaching and research in a changed context: Ukrainian and Belarusian students in Poland after 2022

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This study surveys the situation of Ukrainian and Belarusian students of English at a Polish university after the Russian full-scale invasion on Ukraine in 2022 and the crackdown on civil society in Belarus after the falsified presidential elections of 2020.

On top of individual histories and personal trauma, students from both Ukraine and Belarus found themselves in a new social, political, and linguistic context. Although universities in Poland had had fair numbers of Belarusian and Ukrainian students prior to the full-scale invasion, the issue of language has never been more pronounced than now. Ukrainian students are, as a rule, at least bilingual, with Ukrainian or Russian as their first language. Belarusian students tend to be Russian-speaking, with perhaps a passive command of Belarusian, but many are also bilingual. Many Ukrainian and Belarusian students also have some or fair command of Polish and once in college, their Polish often improves significantly, sometimes to a near-native speaker level. And, as those are students of English, their level of English is at least communicative and very often much higher.

In this context, the study explores the following questions:

- How do Ukrainians students perceive their own identity with respect to the changed status and image of Ukrainian (vs. Russian) in their country?
- How do Belarusian students feel about the status and role of Russian, paradoxically the dominant language in their country, as well as Belarusian (and Ukrainian)?
- How do both Ukrainian and Belarusian students feel about themselves as speakers of English in this situation?
- Should we, as academics, modify the way we teach languages (EFL) and linguistics (Introduction to Linguistics, Translation) in this changed context, and if so, how?
- Can we incorporate this new context in the way we do our research? If so, how?

These questions will be explored on the basis of the author's personal experience and a survey (questionnaire) conducted among Ukrainian and Belarusian students of English at their home university. The questionnaire will help obtain insight into the first-hand experience of the students but will also be used as a means of eliciting keywords for conceptual analysis.