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[Review] LONG ROAD TO SOVEREIGNTY

[of the book]:

Demska O. The Ukrainian Language: A Journey from Bad Ems to Strasbourg.

Kharkiv: Vivat Publishing, 2024. 304 p.

Today, during the time of Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, it is significant to realize that language, as the code of a nation and a marker of national identity, is a factor in the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation and national security, serving as one of the varieties of weapons against the invaders. Therefore, it is time to promote and disseminate the history of the Ukrainian language among the public, highlighting its thorny path to sovereignty. This mission has been taken on by the author of the book «The Ukrainian Language: A Journey from Bad Ems to Strasbourg», Orysia Demska – a linguist, doctor of philological sciences, professor at the National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine, and the first head of the National Commission for State Language Standards (2020–2022). The text is written as a narrative about the history of the Ukrainian language, rather than a scientific treatise (without complex syntactic constructions), in a simple form with authorial comments and reflections, accompanied by illustrations for a broad audience. In 304 pages, Orysia Demska narrates the appearance and development of the Ukrainian language from the Indo-European proto-language to the present day, its interaction with other languages, the history of mutual enrichment, the irreconcilable confrontation with Russian, and the course of linguistic genocides, from which it has nonetheless emerged victorious. The author clearly explains the formation of Ukrainian statehood and national identity through and thanks to language. The conditional starting point of the journey is Bad Ems, from where a decree attempted to convince the world that the Ukrainian language does not exist, has never existed, and cannot exist, while the



endpoint is Strasbourg, where on March 21, 2022, Ukrainian received the status of a future official language of the European Union.

The publication consists of a «Preface», 20 chapters and an index (a list of 77 names). In the «Preface» the author points out the unity of European countries due to the «similar linguistic logic of the emergence of the modern state», while emphasizing the formula of Polish linguist Roman Shul's «language–nation–state», according to which the concepts of «history of the state» and «history of the state's language» are identified. O. Demska sets herself the task of «telling the story of the Ukrainian language as the story of key events» (P. 6), taking into account the scientific works by Ukrainian and world language historians (Ivan Ohiienko, Yuriy Sheveliov, Vasyl Nimchuk, Michael Moser, Thomas Yung, etc.), as well as historians (Ivan Krypiakevych, Omelian Pritsak, Serhiy Plokhiy, Orest Subtelnyi, etc.), thus involving all classical scientific literature in the writing of this book.

Following the preface, the publication includes a section titled «Exercises in Reconstruction», where the author outlines the complex and lengthy process of language creation. The author distinguishes between the internal history of the language, which refers to its emergence and development, and the external history of the language, understood as «the history of the language through the lens of events related to its life – events that define the dynamics of its movement, the strength of its influence, its rises and declines» (P. 12). The Ukrainian language is noted as belonging to the Proto-Indo-European language family; a genealogical tree of the Indo-European language family developed by Franz Bopp is presented. The linguist aptly notes that languages, like people, «are born, develop, mature, experience moments of greatest flourishing, age, and ultimately die» (P. 17). Adhering to the views of Yuriy Sheveliov, she asserts that Old Ukrainian formed based on two dialects – Kyiv-Polissian and Halych-Podilian, which in turn emerged from Proto-Slavic in the 7th century. Criticizing the Pohodin-Sobolevsky theory regarding the existence of a common Russian language for the three «brotherly» nations – Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians – until the 14th century, Orysia Demska acknowledges the functioning of a common literary language for them at that time – Church Slavonic. The section «Language Orders of the Middle Ages» contains information about the coexistence of literary languages (Latin, Ancient Greek, Church Slavonic) and dialects in Europe – the Roman Empire, Byzantium, and Kyiv Rus during the named period. It is noted that the choice of Church Slavonic as the official language in medieval Rus was conditioned by the acceptance of Byzantine Christianity (P. 35).

O. Demska continues the development of the Ukrainian language, based on Yuriy Sheveliov's periodization (P. 36). He identified four periods in the history of the Ukrainian language: Proto-Ukrainian (up to the mid-11th century), Old Ukrainian (mid-11th to late 14th century), Middle Ukrainian (early 15th century to the 18th century), and Modern (late 18th century to the present). Thus, the sections «Pax Rus'» and «Movement to the West» are dedicated to the first two periods. The reader learns that during the era of the Kyiv state, the Ukrainian language and literature flourished, with Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Pereiaslav lands forming the Kyiv state, which «linguists consider the Proto-Ukrainian ethnolinguistic space» (P. 37). Thanks to three princes – Sviatoslav the Brave, Volodymyr the Great, and Yaroslav the Wise – who adhered to the doctrine of «army–faith–language», the Kyiv state became a developed and cultural Eastern European country, covering an area of 1,330,000 square kilometers (a map of Rus from 1015–1113 is provided for clarity), which received Christianity from Byzantium. Two literary languages coexisted: Church Slavonic

(serving the religious and church life of society) and Old Kyiv-based vernacular (penetrating administrative, legal, and artistic-literary spheres), along with territorial dialects and urban koines used in oral speech.

After 1240, when the Mongols destroyed the capital of the great East Slavic state, leading to the decline of geopolitical, religious, and cultural unity in Rus', the second period in the history of the Ukrainian language begins. Here, the author rightly concludes the axiom: «Political decline inevitably leads to cultural decline. Cultural decline leads to the decline of practices related to language, especially in the secular sphere, particularly in its written-literary variant» (P. 54). Despite various upheavals, the Old Kyiv (Old Rus') literary language not only did not disappear in the 13th century but also expanded its sphere of functioning to the Galician-Volhynian principality, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the Principality of Moldavia, where it competed with other literary languages – Church Slavonic, Latin, Polish, and German. It is in this diverse environment that the Ukrainian language enters the next stage of its development – Middle Ukrainian, which the author describes as the longest and most dramatic (P. 63), covering four centuries and six states (the three mentioned above, as well as the Kingdom of Poland, the Hetmanate, and the Russian Empire), and is referred to as «Old Ukrainian».

In the subsequent five sections – «The Beginning of the End», «From Ruthenian to Polish», «Simple Language», «Between the New and Old Worlds», «New Times – New Language» – the reader traces how Old Ukrainian, during the invention of printing, the Renaissance, the Reformation, after the Union triad, «Ruins», and Baroque, experiences its «golden age» (gaining supranationality, multifunctionality, enriched with Polishisms, interacting with other languages of Eastern Europe, serving as the language of offices and legislation), yet also fights for its existence among Latin, Polish, and Church Slavonic. Starting from the early 18th century, when Ukrainian lands were divided between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Moscovia, it begins to lose its positions, being opposed to Polish and Russian languages. «The replacement of Ruthenian-Ukrainian with Polish as the official language changed the balance of linguistic power. However, not for long. A new actor appeared on the scene – the Russian language», writes the author (P. 90). In Moscovia (later the Russian Empire), a ban on everything Ukrainian was imposed. Ukraine was referred to as Little Russia, the Zaporizhzhia Sich was abolished, the Hetmanate and Cossack army were liquidated, serfdom was introduced, and Ukrainian autonomy was completely lost. Muscovy particularly waged a fierce struggle against the Ukrainian language in various spheres of public life as the basis of their self-identity, consciousness as a separate nation, distinct from the Russians. Orysia Demska notes: «The worst part is the emergence of disdain for the Ukrainian language. Both the old literary and the living folk language. This attitude will prove to be extraordinarily long-lasting» (P. 110). Old Ukrainian was reduced to writing lyrical and satirical texts, and eventually faded into the past. However, thanks to Ivan Kotliarevskyi's «Eneida» (1798), not only was the printing of books in Ukrainian restored, but the Ukrainian spoken language and a new literary language based on the vernacular were also legitimized. Hence, the Old Ukrainian period in the history of the Ukrainian language comes to an end.

In the next 11 chapters, the author introduces the reader to a new period in the history of the Ukrainian language. The linguist clearly and convincingly outlines the prerequisites for the systematic development of the literary language, stating that «the literary language needs to be standardized and codified», and it should have «a developed writing system,

defined rules of grammar and pronunciation, clear principles for the use of words and phrases. All of this must be formally documented and published as books: spelling guides, grammar books, dictionaries, supplemented by other texts in this language» (P. 123). In the 19th century, the process of forming a new literary language took place through folk texts collected and published by Mykola Tserteliev, Mykhailo Maksymovych, and through the artistic works of Hryhoriy Kvitka-Osnovianenko, Yevhen Hrebinka, Amvrosiy Metlynskyi, and others, remaining closely connected with the living spoken language. Only from 1840, with the publication of Taras Shevchenko's «Kobzar», did the Ukrainian language emerge as a modern literary language, which during this period developed solely within the artistic style.

The author emphasizes that at this time in Europe, cultural communities – nations – were forming, and «language becomes a symbol of national identity» (P. 141). Therefore, «one of the most important tasks regarding the language is to give it the highest possible social, cultural, political, and economic status» (P. 143). However, in the Russian Empire, where the Ukrainian language was considered a dialect, several prohibitions were imposed on its use, including the Ems Edict and the Valuev Circular. Additionally, the process of Russification of the Ukrainian population made the achievement of this goal appear impossible.

Nevertheless, despite the prohibitions, in the 19th century, the Shevchenko Scientific Society and the first Ukrainian Academy of Sciences were established, the monthly publication «Kyiv Antiquity» was launched, the «Little Russian-German Dictionary» by Yevhen Tymchenko was published, and, most importantly, the «Russian-Ukrainian Dictionary» by M. Umanets and A. Spilka legitimized the name «Ukrainian language».

The author notes that in the 20th century, during 1917–1919, under the Ukrainian Central Rada led by Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, later – Pavlo Skoropadskyi, and the Directory, steps were taken «to recognize itself as a language with official status» (P. 202), namely: for the first time, the official formulation of the concept «state language» appeared, and rules for Ukrainian spelling were approved. Furthermore, the Ukrainian language spread to administration, education, the army, and the judiciary. However, two world wars, totalitarianism, mass repression, famines, extermination and Russification of the Ukrainian people and their intellectual heritage, and political persecution during the Soviet era led, as O. Demska writes «to the internal destruction of the language» (P. 247). It was only in the early 1990^s that the Ukrainian language managed to escape from the shackles of totalitarianism, to win an «existential victory» (P. 270) and become the official language of independent Ukraine.

Hence, O. Demska's popular science publication convincingly argues that the knowledge, study, and preservation of the Ukrainian language enable the people to endure and survive any adverse historical circumstances, preserving their identity.

ДЖЕРЕЛА ТА ЛІТЕРАТУРА

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