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Shifting Tongues, Shifting Powers: Language Ideologies in Wartime Ukraine

This presentation examines the transformation of language ideologies and language policy in Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, with a particular focus on developments up to 2025. The analysis adopts a dual perspective. First, it examines top-down language governance, focusing on key legislative changes related to the state language and minority languages, public statements by high-ranking Ukrainian officials, and the activities of the Commissioner for the Protection of the Ukrainian Language. This approach highlights how wartime conditions have accelerated policy shifts, reinforced the symbolic role of Ukrainian, and reshaped the institutional landscape of linguistic regulation.

Second, the presentation explores bottom-up dynamics by tracing language shifts across various spheres of public life, including culture, business, sports, and everyday communication practices. These examples illustrate how societal choices and grassroots initiatives have interacted with official policies, contributing to the broader reconfiguration of linguistic behaviour and identity.

The presentation also outlines Russia's language policy in the occupied territories of Ukraine, analysing it as part of a broader strategy of coercive assimilation, identity erasure, and symbolic domination. By juxtaposing Ukraine's efforts to strengthen its linguistic sovereignty with Russia's practices in the occupied regions, the talk offers a comprehensive account of how language has become a central arena of ideological struggle and nation-building during wartime.