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I've only recently realised that many non-Ukrainians mistakenly see Russian-speaking Ukrainians as some sort of marginalised social group which has never learned Ukrainian and, not being able to speak or understand it, is left without access to services provided in Ukrainian.

That's... really far off from what is actually happening. Like, light years away. In reality, most people in Ukraine are bilingual — some prefer to use Ukrainian in their daily lives, while others tend to speak Russian more often.

I won't get into the details of why this came to be, but let's just say it has a lot to do with Ukraine being an ex-colony of the Russian Empire (which tried really, really hard to wipe out our language and culture) and, essentially, an ex-colony of the Soviet Union.

Yes, the Soviet Union was \*technically\* a Union of many ethnic states, and it officially preached a policy of equality, ethnic and cultural pluralism, and all of that. In reality, being Russian was The Norm. Sure, you could identify as Ukrainian or Georgian... but only if you

wanted to be potentially seen as a) a fumbling source of real-life comic relief, or b) a potential traitor to Communism, a nationalist and a person to be distrusted and destroyed. However, if you identified as Russian, learned the language and tried to get rid of your “funny”

accent, then you'd probably be rewarded by the system. Because while the other ethnicities were “quirky”, “uncivilised” or “dangerously nationalist”, Russians were seen as... well, normal people. The default type of people. The “right” type of people.

School kids in every part of the Soviet Union were taught in Russian, and learning the language was mandatory. Learning the National language of the republic was optional, and many parents chose to have their kids skip those classes. Because Russian was the only language

you really needed to learn in order to survive in the Soviet Union. So yeah, now we have families that spoke Ukrainian up until a few generations ago, but have been conditioned to see themselves as primarily “Russian-speaking”.

Of course, all of the stereotypes about non-Russian languages being “funny” or “only fit for peasants” that circulated in Soviet pop-culture only helped steer people towards learning Russian and forgetting the language of their grandparents.

So what about modern-day Ukraine? Well, a lot of us know and can speak Russian. Some of us see it as our primary language (for some, this has changed after the “big war” began), while others understand it, but don’t feel comfortable using it. Also, pretty much EVERYONE knows

Ukrainian. It’s been the official language since 1991, it’s the language we learn at school, the language of all official documentation, the language we have our university entrance exams in and so on. Of course, for most of us Ukrainian is much more than that —

it’s the language of our grandparents, and the language Russia tried, but couldn’t, destroy. But I feel like I should highlight the fact that we learn it in school/university, because it just kind of shows you that it’s nearly impossible to be a functioning Ukrainian adult

and NOT know Ukrainian. Sure, you might prefer to use Russian in daily life (mostly out of habit of because you might be worried that you sound a little weird when speaking Ukrainian), but unless you’re a ninety-year-old diehard Soviet revanchist who purposely never learned

Ukrainian out of sheer spite, you definitely know Ukrainian. And the Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking people don’t exist in separate communities (which I was shocked to learn is how many non-Ukrainians imagine it to be like). Everyone understands each other, and many

people just switch languages depending on who they’re talking to and what’s the situation. In fact, it’s really common to see families where one parent uses more Russian, and the other prefers to use Ukrainian. I have friends who’ve decided they want to use more Ukrainian

in their daily lives, or friends who are usually Russian-speaking, but switch to Ukrainian when we hang out because they know I feel more comfortable speaking in Ukrainian. All in all, it’s hugely complicated, and I feel like I’ve really skipped over a lot

of the political dynamics at play here, and the historical and social factors that influenced the situation. But if there’s one thing you take away from this rant-y thread, let it be the fact that the Ukrainian policy concerning language definitely isn’t

“creating ghettos filled with poor, oppressed Russian-speaking people who are forced to watch movies in Ukrainian, even though they don’t understand the language”. Our language policy aims to give Ukrainian a fighting chance and create an environment in which

Russian media won’t flood our market and wipe out everything we’ve built this far.

I am beyond happy to see that so many people took the time to read this! And I’m so grateful for the feedback and the questions and kind words! Wish I could respond to everyone, but since I probably won’t be able to, I just want you all to know how inspiring your support is



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