

PHILOLOGY STUDENTS' APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE USE WITHIN TRANSCARPATHIA'S MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT

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Transcarpathia represents a region of remarkable linguistic diversity. However, the language practices of its tertiary-level students remain insufficiently documented. To address this issue, the present study investigates the linguistic repertoires and everyday language use of philology students enrolled at a higher education institution in Transcarpathia. The research is situated within the theoretical framework of translanguaging, which conceptualizes language not as discrete systems but as a unified, dynamic repertoire of communicative resources. The central aim is to elucidate how students negotiate their multilingual environment, particularly within academic contexts. This inquiry constitutes part of a broader five-year project on foreign language (FL) learning in multilingual higher education and the pedagogical application of translanguaging in FL classrooms, with anticipated contributions to the fields of language education and applied linguistics.

This article introduces preliminary findings from the initial phase of the project, derived from questionnaire data collected from 157 full-time and part-time philology students majoring in English, Hungarian, Ukrainian, and German at the Philology Department of Rákóczi University in Berehove, Transcarpathia. The study examines the extent to which students employ different languages both within the classroom and in broader institutional and informal contexts. As all respondents are multilingual, their language preferences encompass a wide range, including Hungarian, Ukrainian, English, German, Russian, Slovak, French, and other languages. Notably, students articulated highly positive attitudes toward their multilingualism, frequently characterizing it with descriptors such as *proud*, *rewarding*, *valuable*, *important*, *convenient*, *amazing*, and *awesome*. The findings indicate that participants' language use preferences can be described as three-dimensional: mother-tongue (L1) usage in the informal context, state language (L2) usage in the formal context, and foreign language (FL) usage in the academic context.

Key words: *mother tongue (L1), multilingualism, philology students, state language (L2), Transcarpathia.*

ПІДХОДИ СТУДЕНТІВ-ФІЛОЛОГІВ ДО ВИКОРИСТАННЯ МОВИ В БАГАТОМОВНОМУ СЕРЕДОВИЩІ ЗАКАРПАТТЯ

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Закарпаття є регіоном виняткового мовного розмаїття, однак мовні практики студентів закладів вищої освіти залишаються недостатньо дослідженими. Для подолання цієї прогалини дане дослідження спрямоване на аналіз мовних репертуарів та щоденного використання мов студентами-філологами, які навчаються у закладі вищої освіти в Закарпатті. Теоретичною основою виступає концепція транслінгвізму, що трактує мову не як дискретні системи, а як єдиний динамічний репертуар комунікативних ресурсів. Головна мета полягає у з'ясуванні механізмів, за допомогою яких студенти вибудовують свою багатомовну взаємодію, особливо в академічних контекстах. Це дослідження є складовою частиною ширшого п'ятирічного проєкту, присвяченого вивченню іноземних мов (ІМ) у багатомовному освітньому середовищі та педагогічному застосуванню транслінгвізму в аудиторіях ІМ, що має на меті зробити внесок у розвиток мовної освіти та прикладної лінгвістики.

У статті представлено попередні результати першого етапу проєкту, отримані на основі анкетування 157 студентів-філологів денної та заочної форм навчання, які спеціалізуються на англійській, угорській, українській та німецькій мовах на кафедрі філології Закарпатського угорського університету ім. Ференца Ракоці II в місті Берегове, Закарпаття. Проаналізовано масштаби використання студентами різних мов як у навчальному процесі, так і в ширших інституційних та неформальних контекстах. Оскільки всі респонденти є багатомовними, їхні мовні вподобання охоплюють широкий спектр, включаючи угорську, українську, англійську, німецьку, російську, словацьку, французьку та інші мови. Важливо зазначити, що студенти продемонстрували надзвичайно позитивне ставлення до власної багатомовності, часто характеризуючи її такими означеннями, як «гордість», «цінність», «важливість», «зручність», «винагорода», «дивовижність» та «чудовість». Результати засвідчують, що мовні практики учасників дослідження можна описати як тривимірні: використання рідної мови (L1) у неформальному контексті, державної мови (L2) у формальному контексті та іноземної мови (ІМ) в академічному контексті.

***Ключові слова:** рідна мова (L1), багатомовність, студенти-філологи, державна мова (L2), Закарпаття.*

Statement of the problem. Transcarpathia, a border region of Ukraine, is defined by its unique and profound multilingualism. Despite this linguistic richness, the specific language habits and choices of its students within tertiary education remain an under-researched area. This gap in knowledge is particularly relevant given the global paradigm shift in understanding how multilingual individuals use their full range of linguistic resources.

To address this, our study investigates the linguistic repertoires and daily language usage of philology students at a higher education institution in Transcarpathia. Our research is fundamentally grounded in the theory of translanguaging, which moves beyond the traditional view of language as separate, bounded systems, instead

conceptualizing a single, dynamic repertoire of resources that speakers draw upon strategically. The core objective is to illuminate how these students effectively navigate their complex multilingual environment, particularly within the demands of an academic setting. This investigation is part of a larger, five-year research initiative focused on foreign language (FL) learning within a multilingual higher education environment and the implementation of pedagogical translanguaging in FL classes. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to the fields of language education and applied linguistics. In this article, we present the preliminary results of the first phase of this research, which were obtained from questionnaire data regarding the language usage habits of 157 full-time and part-time philology students at the Philology Department of Rákóczi University in Berehove, Transcarpathia.

The need for more than one language has been a part of human life in most communities since ancient times, arising from various social, cultural, and economic factors. Transcarpathia represents a distinctive region where complex historical and geopolitical developments have resulted in a bi- and multilingual population. Most people use more than one language either regularly or intermittently in daily communication. Stavans and Jessner [1, p. 1] note that «multilingualism today typifies individuals of all backgrounds – educated and less educated, affluent and poor, in rural and urban communities, and across diverse geographical areas». They emphasize that political, historical, educational, and economic dynamics have transformed formerly monolingual or bilingual societies into multilingual ones, highlighting the role of the European Union as a catalyst for the changing linguistic diversity in recent decades, observing that research on multilingualism remains largely centered in Europe and North America.

One of the key challenges bi- and multilingual individuals face is determining which languages they consider essential in their everyday lives, which they choose to maintain or allow to fade and which they wish to learn. Family Language Policy (FLP), a research field that has recently attracted increasing scholarly attention, examines how families and individuals negotiate their language choices. Although a considerable body of research has focused on Ukraine's language policy, particularly with regard to heritage and minority languages [2–4], comparatively little attention has been devoted to language choice and maintenance at the family or individual level in Transcarpathia [5; 6]. Váradi [6] examined the attitudes of 185 Hungarian – Ukrainian bilingual university students towards bilingualism and multilingualism. Seventy percent of the respondents live in a bilingual environment and consider themselves bilinguals, as they speak at least two languages at an advanced level. They value the environment and regard it as an advantage, as it fosters greater acceptance of other cultures. In contrast, thirty percent of the respondents reported a lack of confidence in their second language and, therefore, do not consider themselves bilingual. Apart from the advantages of being bilingual, a relatively small number of the respondents (10%) mentioned certain drawbacks such as uncertainty about self-identity, language mixing, the use of loanwords in monolingual environments, a smaller vocabulary in both languages, greater difficulty in producing grammatically correct sentences, and, finally, the possibility

of developing an accent. It should be taken into account that languages influence one another in various ways, including the use of borrowings, frequent code-switching, and morphological or phonological deviations from standard norms [7]. Regarding foreign language learning, 83% of respondents believe that children should learn several languages, including English, German, and Russian. Having analysed the students' responses, Váradi concludes that in multilingual environments, individuals need to know at least three languages: their mother tongue (e.g., Hungarian), the language of their immediate environment (e.g., Ukrainian), and a global language (e.g., English). Koch, Kersten and Greve [8] examined the effect of multilingualism regarding emotional competence and found that the degree of multilingualism significantly predicted emotional competence directly and was mediated by cultural heterogeneity but not by language switching, executive functions, or divergent thinking. Overall, the studies suggest that multilingualism affects individuals not only linguistically but also in terms of identity, cognition, and emotional competence.

The purpose of the article is to answer key questions, including the extent to which students use different languages both within and beyond their language classes, across institutional and informal contexts. Given that all student respondents are multilingual, their preferred language choices across diverse situations encompass a wide range of languages, including Hungarian, Ukrainian, English, German, Russian, Slovak, and French. The main objective is to determine when, how, and for what purposes philology students use their L1, L2 and FL.

Presentation of the main material of the study. The present article introduces certain results of our research carried out with philology students majoring in English, Hungarian, and Ukrainian in Transcarpathia, through which we investigated what languages students apply in which situations and for what purposes.

Altogether, 157 students majoring in English, Hungarian, and Ukrainian at the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian University completed a language repertoire questionnaire. Their ages ranged between 16 and 46. Table 1 shows that students in their teens (16–19-year-olds) were mostly represented among the respondents.

Table 1

Age of the respondents

Age (years)	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	31	34	37	38	39	42	44	46	50	TOTAL
Student number	4	35	33	15	20	13	14	4	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	157
%	2.5	22.3	21	9.5	12.7	8.3	8.9	2.5	1.3	1.9	0.6	1.3	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	1.9	0.6	0.6	0.6	100

Regarding respondents' gender, 23 (14.6%) were male and 134 (85.4%) were female.

Figure 1 shows the nationality division of the respondents who claimed to be either Hungarian (74–47%) or Ukrainian (72–46%), or both Ukrainian and Hungarian (11–7%). It also indicates the national affiliation of students majoring in English (GB), Hungarian (HU), and Ukrainian (UA) philology. A significant finding is that the highest number of Ukrainian respondents studied Ukrainian philology.

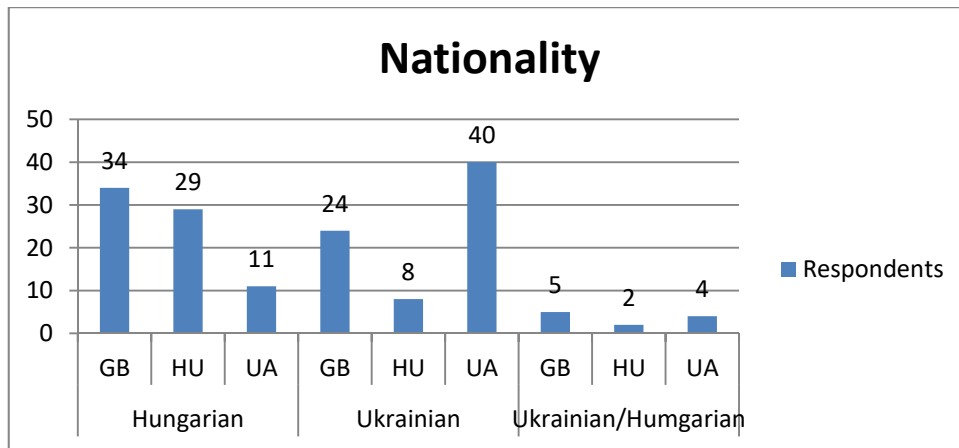


Fig. 1. Nationality of respondents (GB=English major students, HU=Hungarian major students, UA=Ukrainian major students)

The respondents understood and spoke a wide range of languages. The list of languages and the number of respondents who spoke them is presented in Figure 2. Surprisingly, there was one student majoring in Hungarian philology who did not report understanding or speaking Hungarian. In addition, six respondents mentioned that they spoke other languages. However, they failed to specify which languages they meant.

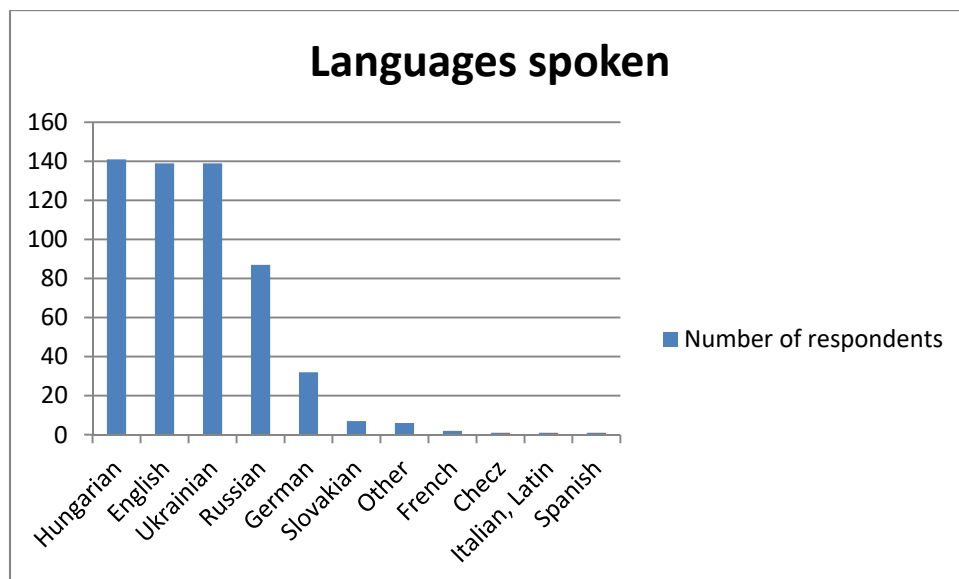


Fig. 2. Languages spoken by the respondents

A questionnaire was designed with the help of Google Forms inquiring about the language repertoire and language usage habits. It was administered online to full-time and part-time philology students majoring in English, Ukrainian, and Hungarian. Altogether, 157 students completed the questionnaire at a Transcarpathian university. The questionnaire included questions about the languages the respondents applied when communicating at home, with their families, with their friends, as well as about those that they used in the academic environment.

In this article, certain areas of language use of philology students are highlighted. The analysis covers the aggregated data obtained from the questionnaires with the help of qualitative descriptive analysis, singling out recurring patterns within the data. The results are presented in relation to the research questions.

The importance of maintaining one's home language or L1

The comprehensive data from the questionnaires completed by English major, Ukrainian major, and Hungarian major students reveal a remarkable convergence of student opinion on the importance of maintaining one's home language, rooted primarily in identity, culture, and familial bonds. While the specific framing varies based on the geopolitical context of the respondents (e.g., majority vs. minority language status), the underlying psychological and social needs are universal.

All three data sets place identity and culture as the primary pillar for maintaining the home language. Students emphasized the language's role as «Part of Self/Identity» («shapes our identity», «it's part of our personality») and the preservation of «Culture & Heritage». Some respondents utilized highly emotive and existential phrasing, viewing the language as the «essence of who they are». Phrases like «Рідна мова формує нашу самосвідомість» (Native language forms our self-awareness) and the Hungarian «A saját énem az anyanyelvem... nem is én vagyok» (My own self is my mother tongue... I am not myself) illustrate this deep, existential link.

The maintenance of the home language is universally tied to social survival, particularly within the family unit. This is supported by the most highly cited reasons, e.g. «to preserve family ties, culture, and traditions». This shows the direct link between language and the structural integrity of the family. Other significant reasons included “a vital tool for maintaining relationships” and a key to maintaining «зв'язок між поколіннями» (connection between generations) for communication with «бабусями, дідусями, родичами» (grandmas, grandpas, and relatives). The response about not being able to «express myself as well in another language» highlights the home language's role as the vessel for deepest emotional understanding.

While all students valued their language, the Ukrainian and Hungarian major student-respondents framed maintenance as an act of cultural and political survival, a perspective less pronounced in the general English-language responses. A pronounced «Worry of Loss and Language Preservation» was expressed. The data indicated direct concerns about «Preventing Language Death» («Без нас, мовців, мова не виживає») and the explicit need to «preserve the Hungarian language in Zakarpattia», highlighting the reality of minority language status. The need to «give this language to our future children» is a strong sub-theme, reflecting the recognized duty to pass on this heritage to future generations.

The significance of being multilingual

The combined data from English, Ukrainian, and Hungarian responses reveal a resounding affirmation of multilingualism, viewing it as a powerful asset that is crucial for navigating both personal growth and modern life. The sentiment across all groups is overwhelmingly positive, with near-unanimous agreement that being multilingual is a privilege and a significant advantage.

The reasons for valuing multilingualism fall into the same three, strongly weighted categories. The first is the social and cultural enrichment. This is consistently the single most cited benefit. Multilingualism is seen as the key to connection and a broadened perspective. The ability to «talk with everybody» and «communicate with people from different countries» is paramount. It is a cognitive tool that expands understanding (English: «multiple lenses through which to view the world»; Hungarian: «tágabb a világképe» – broader worldview; Ukrainian: «розширює світогляд» – broadens the worldview). It facilitates access to «new cultures, literature, traditions» and helps people «get to know other cultures as well».

The second category is concerned with utility, opportunities, and resilience. This theme highlights the concrete, tangible benefits that multilingualism provides for future success and ease of life. It was viewed as a massive professional advantage. The data explicitly shows this, with «Hasznos» (Useful) being the most frequent single response. In addition, responses stated that it «opens many opportunities» in «study, work, and self-development». It «makes life much easier» and helps individuals «cope more easily with difficulties».

The third category related to cognitive benefits and identity growth. Multilingualism is valued for the profound effect it has on the mind and the self in that it is recognized for its role in developing the brain, memory, and thinking flexibility («enhances cognitive abilities»; «develops memory and brain activity»). The role of language in expanding one's selfhood and achieving greater personal growth is emphasized by the respondents.

Hungarian responses specifically identify multilingualism as a «natural phenomenon» in their region, where multiple nationalities live side-by-side, suggesting it's less an earned skill and more a necessity for daily existence. Both Ukrainian and Hungarian speakers express «great pride» (Ukrainian: «велику гордість»; Hungarian: «Nagyon büszke vagyok»), often feeling validated by their ability to function in a bilingual or multilingual environment.

Students' attitude to native-language instruction in tertiary education

The respondents had the opportunity to express their thoughts and views of the helpfulness of using their mother tongues during the learning process. The statistical data showed a high level of agreement among students, with answers «very helpful» and «helpful» prevailing. There was only one Ukrainian native speaker who found it completely useless to use the mother tongue in the learning process («not helpful at all»), while three students considered it «not helpful» (see Figure 3). The data support the claim that mother tongue education is of utmost importance (97% of the respondents hold this view).

The combined data from English, Ukrainian, and Hungarian respondents reveal a resoundingly positive and appreciative attitude towards native-language instruction in higher education, viewing it as a critical factor for academic success, personal comfort, and cultural survival.

The analysis consistently highlights two paramount reasons for valuing mother tongue education:

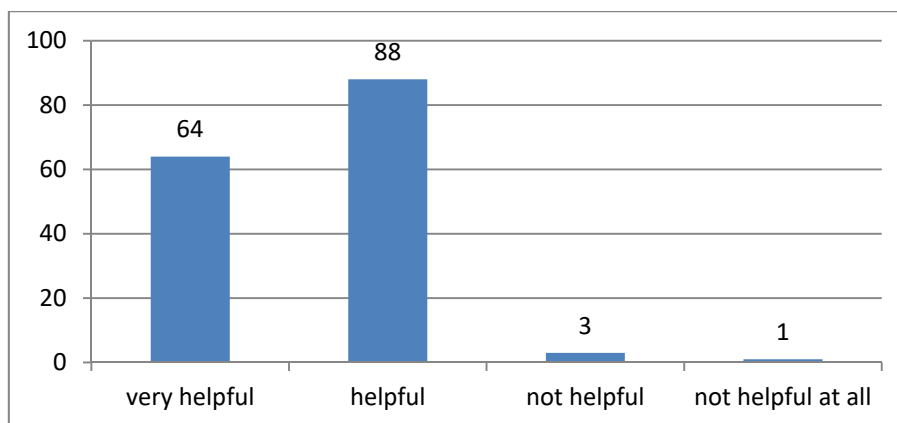


Fig. 3. Helpfulness of learning in the mother tongue (absolute numbers of respondents)

a. Enhanced learning and cognitive utility

Students across all groups prioritize the cognitive advantages of learning in their native language, recognizing it as the path of least resistance to complex knowledge. The most common reason is the immediate utility of the mother tongue in making complex ideas «easier to understand» and «considerably simpler». Respondents majoring in Hungarian reinforce this by calling it «the most effective» way to learn and stating that «all forms of knowledge can primarily be acquired through our native language». They also emphasized that the native language provides «cognitive relief», reducing stress («I become less anxious») and boosting «confidence». It enables students to «express my ideas clearly» and think/speak up «most comfortably».

b. Identity, heritage, and right to education

Instruction in the mother tongue is seen as a necessary cultural act, particularly for the Hungarian and Ukrainian native respondents in a multilingual region. The language is a key component of the self, helping to «preserve cultural identity» and keep one's «culture alive» while studying. Students often frame the opportunity as a «right to education» («Everyone deserves to study in the language that is native to them») and a reason for «Gratitude and Pride» («Рада та вдячна», «Nagyon büszke vagyok»). This is underscored by the feeling of being «valued and respected» (a Ukrainian native respondent). Respondents explicitly express appreciation for the opportunity to study in Hungarian «in this Ukrainian-speaking country» and note the institutional goal to «preserve and develop the Hungarian language».

While the love for the mother tongue is absolute, the responses reveal a sophisticated, pragmatic awareness of global academic and professional realities, creating a tension between necessity and opportunity. A significant portion recognizes that English is essential for «broader academic opportunities», «more academic resources», and «improving English skills in every sphere». They advocate for foreign languages to «open up more opportunities» globally.

The most thoughtful students call for a «balance between both», i.e. utilizing the native language for deep comprehension while simultaneously engaging with international languages for global access. One master's student found native-language

instruction «boring», preferring the challenge of a full English program. Some minority students note that while they appreciate the native language option, they also know the state language (Ukrainian), making the native language option important, but not the only necessary option. Another suggestion was to offer subjects in both Hungarian and Ukrainian to maximize student choice and accessibility.

In conclusion, the data shows that mother tongue education is overwhelmingly affirmed as a psychological and academic necessity, but it is also understood that its value exists within a multilingual ecosystem where international languages (like English) are critical for career and global connectivity. Students desire an educational model that successfully bridges these two worlds.

Personal experience of university students with multiple language use in an academic setting

The three data sets (English, Ukrainian, and Hungarian questionnaires) provide a cohesive, detailed picture of how students strategically employ multiple languages for academic purposes. The overall practice is necessity-driven, pragmatic, and focused on enhancing both comprehension and access to resources. Based on the obtained data, we were able to reconstruct the mechanisms of how languages are employed by philology students in the given context. In what follows, we present a comparison of the language usage mechanisms that we have defined for mother tongue use and foreign language application. Table 2 summarizes the data from the questionnaires completed by English, Ukrainian, and Hungarian major students.

Table 2

Comparison of philology students' language usage mechanisms

Mechanism	English majors	Ukrainian majors	Hungarian majors
1	2	3	4
Translation for understanding	Primary use for translating complex concepts; comparing grammatical structures.	«Прочитаю і укр., і угорсь., щоб зрозуміти правильно» (I will read both in UKR and HUN to understand correctly).	«először megtanulom a tartalmát magyarul, amit majd átfordítok fejben angolra» (first I learn content in HUN, then translate in head into ENG).
Note-taking/drafting	Notes often taken in native language even when material is in a foreign language.	«перепишу матеріал» (rewriting the material) in native language to aid memory.	HUN used for «jegyzetelésre, beadandók írására» (note-taking, writing assignments).
Lexical/concept check	Looking up definitions in native language when ENG concept is difficult.	Using ENG when «не можу згадати слово на українській» (cannot recall a word in UKR).	Switching languages when experiencing a gap: «ha nem tudok egy bizonyos szót valamelyik nyelven, akkor megmondom más nyelven» (I say it in another language).

1	2	3	4
Wider source access	Using multiple languages (UA, HU, ENG, RUS) to « access a significantly broader range » of material.	Using multiple languages to « шукаю інформацію різними мовами » (search for information in different languages).	« több szakirodalmat találni angolul » (find more professional literature in English); « sokszor jobb információk vannak egy adott témáról ukránul » (better information is available in Ukrainian).
High-stakes documentation	–	Using UKR for official documents and participation in national events.	UKR is vital for writing « szakdolgozatok és diplomamunkák bevezető részének megírásakor » (theses introductions) and official requests (kérvények).
Research synthesis	Comparing sources in different languages for better research.	Translating foreign sources (ENG, HUN, etc.) into the language of the final paper.	Reading ENG, UKR, and HUN literature, then summarizing/translating into HUN for essays.
Practice & skill development	Active practice via reading, speaking, and writing in the target language	Using the language in class; mixed languages in « У студентському чаті » (student chat) for convenience.	Using the language the class is held in; using ENG during ENG lessons to develop vocabulary.
Assignment/writing process	Writing first drafts in the native language before translating to the required language (often English).	Presentations and research often require bilingual preparation.	HU for drafts; ENG for final research; switching between languages for « tananyag megértésére, fordítására » (understanding and translating curriculum).

All three data sets consistently show that multilingual usage is a dynamic, necessity-driven strategy for survival and academic excellence in this complex linguistic environment. Native language (HUN/UKR) serves as the essential cognitive foundation for conceptual grounding, comfort, and cultural documentation. Foreign/state languages (ENG/UKR) function as the primary access tool for global academic resources, official communication, and career development. The core mechanism is translation and comparison, which students use to achieve a depth of understanding that would be impossible when using only one language. This flexibility is not a luxury but a highly efficient academic skill.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The combined data confirm the central hypothesis: for these students, maintaining their home language is not a preference, but a necessity for personal and cultural preservation. The language is the foundation for self-identity, the key to familial continuity, and a vulnerable cultural

resource that requires active defense, particularly in a multilingual, often politically sensitive region. While English is valued for external utility (career, academic access), the home language provides internal coherence and a sense of belonging.

In conclusion, the data demonstrate that for these students, multilingualism is a fundamental and transformative part of their experience. It is a source of pride and a powerful engine for social inclusion, intellectual agility, and economic opportunity, far outweighing the minor noted difficulties. Further research will investigate the trans-languaging practices of these multilingual philology students in an academic context.

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