Identity in Flux: Gender Norms and the English Language in Today's Ukraine

Melanie Carter

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, First and Second Language Acquisition Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, Modern Languages Commons, Other Film and Media Studies Commons, Politics and Social Change Commons, Slavic Languages and Societies Commons, and the Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/1277

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Identity in Flux:
Gender Norms and the English Language in Today’s Ukraine

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by
Melanie Marie Carter

Accepted for

High Honors

(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Elena Prokhorova, Director

Claire McKinney

Alexander Prokhorov

Frederick Comney

Williamsburg, Virginia
April 19, 2019
Abstract

Using two concepts, cultural capital and gender as a social practice, this thesis explores intersections of the English language and gender norms and attitudes in the identity of young people in today’s Ukraine. Unlike many previous studies that have focused primarily on university students or school-age children and often used quantitative methods, this thesis offers qualitative analysis of the interviews I conducted with adults, who chose to continue to learn English. The major findings are that there are two main intersections of language and gender in Ukraine. On the one hand, traditional gender norms lead men, more than women, to instrumental motivations to learn English (better jobs, i.e., economic capital). On the other hand, while both men and women associated English with cultural capital (such as education and status), for women it is also a way to reject traditionalism and create a new identity for themselves. Ultimately, language is more than what people speak; it is an embodiment of ideas, values, and norms.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.............................................................................................................4  
Introduction....................................................................................................................5  
Chapter I: An Introduction to L2 Motivational Research  
and the Methodology of the Study..................................................................................9  
  Motivations for Learning English as a Second Language: Literature Review..........9  
  Methodology................................................................................................................12  
  Demographics of Interviewees....................................................................................14  
Chapter II: Gender in Ukraine: From Soviet Heritage to Nationalist Revival.............17  
  Perceptions of Gender and Feminism........................................................................20  
  Interviewee Responses on Gender..........................................................................23  
    Gendered Professions and the Wage Gap..............................................................23  
    Body Image.............................................................................................................28  
    Family Norms and Western Media.....................................................................30  
Chapter III: The Intersection of Gender and Motives for Learning English...............34  
  The Place of the English Language in the Late Soviet Union and Post-Socialist Countries:  
    Continuities and Changes.....................................................................................34  
  The Virtual English-Language World and its Influence on Ukrainian Society.........39  
  Motivations for the Study of English:  
    From the Ought-To L2 Self to the Ideal L2 Self...............................................45  
  Motivations for Learning English:  
    Gendered Variation in the Development of the L2 Self......................................51  
Conclusion.....................................................................................................................57  
Appendices.....................................................................................................................59  
  Appendix I: List of Interview Questions.................................................................59  
  Appendix II: Table of TV Shows and Movies per Genre and Gender......................60  
Work Cited....................................................................................................................61
Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of friends, family, advisors, and committee members. First, I must thank Professor Claire McKinney for supporting and advising my Interdisciplinary major, International Gender-Based Inequalities, which exposed me to diverse ways of thinking about how gender is related to various academic fields. In addition to the role of major adviser, Professor Claire McKinney was also crucial to the initial development of my research proposal and procurement of approval from the PHSC for conducting interviews. Second, I wish to express my sincere thanks to Professor Elena Prokhorova for patiently and meticulously advising this thesis to its final draft. She was instrumental to the entire research and writing process. Third, I am appreciative of the other two committee members, Professor Alexander Prokhorov and Professor Frederick Corney, for taking time to read this thesis and provide feedback. Finally, I am eternally grateful to the many hospitable Ukrainians I met and the language school in Khmelnitsky, Ukraine for allowing me to learn from them as a researcher, student, and teacher. Without my interviewees’ willingness to speak openly with a young, feminist American woman about their experiences, thoughts, and country, this thesis would not exist.
Introduction

I went to Ukraine thinking that I understood the complexity of what language is and has the power to be, but I left with more questions than answers. On the one hand, for a native English speaker, Ukraine, beyond the capital, Kiev, is not an easy country to navigate. Even with Russian language skills in a mostly bilingual Ukraine, it was difficult to comprehend what I saw and heard during the two months I lived there. English was the reason I was invited to Khmelnitsky, Ukraine (located where the marker is in Figure 1), a city not well known to Western tourists. I was in Ukraine to teach others my native language, a language that makes me a valuable asset in this globalizing world. However, what Ukrainians viewed as a highly desired skill, at times felt to me like a burden as I struggled my way through reading menus and food labels in Ukrainian, with a rare occurrence of English translations.

Figure 1: Map of Ukraine (World Atlas)
On the other hand, my initial fear of speaking Russian faded away as I realized that the average Ukrainian, at least in urban areas, was not that concerned about which of the two languages you spoke. In fact, many Ukrainians speak Surzhyk, a hybrid of Ukrainian and Russian, and some of them told me that, most of the time, they do not know which language they are speaking. However, one can notice nationalist-fueled tensions over language in state propaganda; in waitresses refusing to speak to you in Russian even though you are a foreigner with little knowledge of Ukrainian; in stories of people ceasing to speak Russian as a show of national pride, etc.

The complexities of language situation in Ukraine deserves greater attention, but for this thesis it is particularly important to comprehend that English is part of this contested linguistic and ideological tension. Ukrainian, Russian, and English are all charged with different symbolic meaning and practical usage. Ultimately, language is much more than what people speak; it is an embodiment of ideas, values and norms.

While my original goal was the study of gendered motivations for learning English, I realized that language is just one facet of identity at a global, national, and individual level. As a result, the scope of my argument expanded to include an overview of gender norms, ideas of class and cultural identity, generational tensions, and the influence of Western media, all of which, along with the motivations for learning English, inform my interviewees’ sense of self as manifested in their answers.

Two concepts are central to this study: “cultural capital” and gender as a social practice. In his work “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction,” French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu argues that social reproduction—and the reproduction of power relations in general—is not limited to economic relations and resources but rather involves institutions, as well as more
symbolic realms of culture. Bourdieu introduced the concept of “cultural capital” in his attempt to examine how class inequalities relate to the educational system. His conception moves the focus of social differentiation beyond just economic capital toward “cultural and social capital, which were assessed by calculating education and qualifications, manners, taste, knowledge, social ties, and access to information and resources” (Boudieu qtd. in Phillips 186-7). The English language is increasingly becoming a global language (see David Crystal); proficiency in English is thus a major asset, a form of cultural capital, the practical benefit and symbolic value of which cannot be underestimated.

The idea that certain transmittable cultural codes and social practices get normalized and validated in society also underlies much of the recent work on gender. In her book Gender Trouble, Judith Butler, for example, argues that the category of gender is culturally constructed and reproduced through its “performance,” that is, through repetition of certain practices, behaviors, and discourses about “normative” gender(ed) positions. This construction and reproduction places men and women in boxes of what is socially acceptable and expected for each gender. Traditionally, men are conditioned to provide for their families, whereas women are socialized to be faithful wives, mothers, and homemakers.

My thesis utilizes these two concepts, cultural capital and gender as a social construction, to examine the motivations of adult learners of English in Ukraine from a gendered perspective. According to Susan Ehrlich, it is not gender that interacts with linguistic practices, “but rather the complex set of gendered social practices that individuals participate in” (440). This means that research on gendered motives for learning English is actually a case study of how “gendered social practices” interact with “linguistic practices” to inform the differentiation in female and male motivations for learning the English language.
I argue that the societal construction of gender norms contributes to the variation of motives for learning English. To that effect, I examine changes, continuities, and contradictions in how young Ukrainians see themselves and their society via gender and the English language. I claim that gender and language intersect in two ways. First, as gender norms remain quite traditional in Ukraine for a variety of reasons, I explore how internalized gender roles (where men are the primary breadwinner) lead to men, but not women, having primarily instrumental motivations to study English as a skill that adds to their economic capital. Second, while both young men and women associate proficiency in English with cultural capital that identifies one as a modern person integrated into the global culture, for women, language is also a forum “to reject traditionalism and create a self-identity that they want through language attitudes and linguistic behavior” (Bilaniuk 54). In fact, as research shows, since women have less access to material capital, in general, they “seek more symbolic capital via language use” to escape the identity of being “socially vulnerable” (Bilaniuk, 49; Phillips 185). And indeed, in my research female interviewees’ answers were much more varied and nuanced, and female interviewees were more aware of the positive symbolic power English has in shaping their identity.

In Chapter I, I establish the theoretical framework for my research, describe my methodology and offer a demographic portrait of the interviewees. Chapter II provides an overview of factors affecting gender norms and gender policy in today’s Ukraine, followed by an analysis of the interviewees’ responses concerning gender. Chapter III establishes continuities and changes in language education from the late Soviet era to today’s Ukraine; it then addresses interviewee responses to a series of questions related to gendered motives for learning English.
Chapter I:
An Introduction to L2 Motivational Research and the Methodology of the Study

Individuals and governments around the globe see the English language as a gateway to economic opportunity and social mobility, as the world becomes increasingly connected through media, trade, travel, and migration. This globalization has increased both the desire for English language education in schools and the motivation to learn the language beyond secondary education. Ukraine is a particularly interesting case because it is currently at a crossroads between an alliance with the European Union or with Russia after the Euromaidan revolution and Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014. Continued violence along the Russian border and the movement of internally displaced persons has contributed to the Ukrainian government’s desire for Eurocentric solutions and assistance. As such, the government has been actively expanding opportunities for English language education through funding and resources for both children and adults to learn. The hope is that increased English language presence will translate into higher chances for connections of all kinds with the West. These connections can mean access to goods, services, travel, employment, migration, foreign marriages, and more. Western connections also mean a shift toward Eurocentric political alliances and away from Russia, with which Ukraine has been allied for most of its history. Thus, Ukraine is at a pivotal point in its transition, where English language proficiency fulfills many functions.

Motivations for Learning English as a Second Language: Literature Review

Historically, connections with the Anglophone West were often a result of imperial expansion, which brought along the spread of the English language. However, in countries that are not already highly fluent in English, such as many post-Soviet states, individuals must make the decision to learn English to a high level of proficiency. Thus, motivation for learning English as an adult is important for understanding how and why English is the lingua franca of choice.
For the purposes of this study, I understand motivation “as the rationale for learning a second language” beyond compulsory secondary education (Tokar 7). The most prominent researcher on motivation for learning second languages, Richard Gardner, divides motivation into two types: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivations are those that are more tactical, such as economic goals, while integrative motivations are measured by an integrative orientation toward the other language community.

While Gardner includes here motives focused on “an openness toward the other language community or other language communities in general” (217), the term suggests that the primary purpose of such learners is becoming part of another linguistic community (e.g., immigration). Joshua Tokar, who completed his dissertation in 2017 on motives for learning English at a Ukrainian theological seminary, argues that the integrative motivation is no longer adequate in countries such as Ukraine as there is no distinct community of English speakers that individuals necessarily hope to integrate into, following Zoltan Dörnyei’s findings\(^1\) in Hungary (7).

Instead, Tokar’s study uses Dörnyei’s L2\(^2\) Motivational Self System, which reframes the integrative motivation as “possible selves” that emerge in the process of learning another language: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 learning experience (8). For the purposes of this thesis, only the first two selves will be used in the analysis of interviewee responses because the last one is not relevant to motivations discussed here. The Ideal L2 Self “refers to the L2 speakers that learners would like to become, such as an immigrant in an English-speaking country or a businessman engaged in international commerce,” while the Ought-to L2 Self is founded in “qualities one ought to possess to meet expectations and avoid

---

1 A Professor of Psycholinguistics at the University of Nottingham, Dörnyei conducted his research in Hungary in 2006. In his study of young people in Hungary, he showed that students’ motivation to study English is often coupled with a poor opinion of English-speaking countries.

2 L2 is short for second language acquisition.
potentially negative outcomes,” including “learning English to satisfy the expectations of one’s parents, get good grades, or meet educational requirements” (8; emphasis mine.-MC).

Differentiating these selves can be difficult in analyzing adult learners, who must choose to continue to learn as an adult and need to have, therefore, at least a modicum of an aspirational idea of self. Therefore, in this thesis I argue that the Ought-to Self for adults extends to motivations like learning for communication with foreign clients, as well as immigration that is primarily founded in economic mobility, like migrating for work. The Ideal Self, on the other hand, includes identity-based motivations such as love of the language and communication with foreigners. I will demonstrate later that these selves are gendered, with men more often aligning with the Ought-to Self and women with the Ideal Self.

While Tokar’s analysis is focused specifically on seminary students, some of the findings are relevant here. First, he found that students in their second or third year of the program were more interested in communication with other cultures than those in their first year (38). This is likely particularly true for theological students because international missions align with their career aspirations and as such, they are motivated to communicate with foreigners because it is their job. He admits that only one of the thirty-three students enrolled in the English program was at an intermediate level or higher, which means that most of the students could not actually use their language skills for their desired motivations (59). In contrast, my interviewees were able to freely express complex thoughts in English. Further, Tokar pays very little attention to gender, but he does include a small section on gender-specific results. For example, he found that the number one motivational factor for men was employment, while for women it was communication, which broadly aligns with my hypothesis and findings (56).
Two other recent motivational studies for learning English—a comparative study of Arab vs. non-Arab students by Said Al Harthy and a study of young people (ages 10-18) at Sarajevo by Senad Becirovic—both come to similar results. Al Harthy, for example, finds that women have a higher degree of integrative motivation and writes that a co-presence of both motivational types raises “confidence, self-esteem, and effort to perform better in learning the language” (127). The limitations of these studies, as well as Tokar’s discussed above, is the purely quantitative approach to the data. There is no narrative behind the answers of the students on their motivational or achievement level, which prevents a deeper and more complex understanding of the way students and teachers alike think about the role of English in their lives and their identity.

Methodology

From late-May to mid-July of 2018, I taught English in Khmelnitsky, Ukraine to (mostly) adults six days a week. The school consisted of two floors out of a four-story building, and its sole purpose was foreign language education. It was a unique environment because not only were there Ukrainian teachers, but they also actively recruited native speakers of all languages taught at the school. Native speakers of English are the most desired by the school because it is the most in demand by students. I found about the school online and interviewed with the director, who also participated in this project. After my dates were confirmed and my research proposal complete, I contacted the director about conducting interviews in addition to teaching, and she approved it.

Through connections made at the school with fellow teachers, students, and staff, I found twelve Ukrainians to conduct semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted anywhere from fifteen to forty minutes, depending on how much the interviewee was willing to share and how
good their English was. Agreeing to an interview was completely voluntary, with phone numbers, emails, and names collected on a sign-up sheet. I then contacted these individuals about times for a prospective interview. Before each interview, I had each interviewee read through and sign a research participant consent form (provided in English and Russian), whereby they agreed to be recorded. The same base questions were asked for every interview, but follow-up questions varied based on individual responses. All of the interviewees were at least at what the school called an “upper intermediate” level. At this level, students were able to express their thoughts and talk with me without much hesitation. Participants benefited from this project because it was the chance to practice English in a conversational setting rather than a formal classroom setting.

English is not their native language, so there were limitations to how well they could express their thoughts. Interviews in either Ukrainian or Russian would have provided the interviewees with more vocabulary and a greater sense of comfort, which in turn potentially could have produced more detailed and nuanced answers. However, my decision to conduct interviews in English was motivated by my research question: What is the role of the English language in the interviewee’s identity, both explicitly stated in their answers and observable in their discourse and self-presentation in a foreign language?

Finally, as Linda Shopes notes, oral history interviews and interviewees’ (she calls them “narrators”) answers are shaped by a variety of factors, not the least of them being the interviewer’s own identity: “Like narrators, interviewers have social identities that are played out_3Joan Sangster notes that the gender identity of the interviewee “becomes a cognitive filter for their experiences,” which contributes to how men and women express their responses with men connecting their narratives to public events like war and women expressing their narratives to more personal matter like family. Further, Gwen Etter-Lewis states that women’s narratives also tend towards “understatement, avoidance of the first-person point of view, rare mention of personal accomplishments, and disguised statements of personal power” (qtd. in Sangster 89).
in the dynamic of the interview. Narrators assess interviewers, deciding what they can appropriately say to this person, what they must say, and what they should not say.” In this respect, my own identity as a young American woman certainly played a role in the interview process. On the one hand, my native English language and my American identity, in addition to my status as a teacher at the school, provided me with some authority. On the other hand, as a young woman, conducting interviews in a rather traditional society, I had to gain the trust of my interviewees in order for them to speak with me candidly about their experiences.

After establishing the demographic background of each participant, interview questions (see Appendix I) focused on two aspects of the interviewee’s identity: 1) their perception of gender norms in today’s Ukraine, and 2) their experience with and motivation to study English, as well as their perceptions of the role English plays in Ukrainian society today. When transcribing the interviews from the recordings, I wrote word for word what they said, but for clarity, the quoted speech will be an edited version of the original. The names of all interviewees and the school I worked at will remain anonymous in accordance with the guidelines of my university. As is often true of field research, the conclusions in this thesis are not highly generalizable as the sample size was limited in number, location, and social class. However, I remained true to my research design and methodology that relied on a theoretical framework previously established.

**Demographics of Interviewees**

Of the twelve interviewees, seven are women and five are men⁴. They all have at least a bachelor’s degree, with many of them working towards or already in possession of higher levels

---

⁴ It is important to note that at no point did I ask what gender my interviewees identified as because this type of question could lead to animosity in a more traditional society. Therefore, I based their genders off observed characteristics.
of education. Their ages range from 21 to 36, with six interviewees (four women and two men) under 27 years old and six of them 27 or older (three women and three men). Interviewees’ age is important in many respects, from their life experience (e.g., memories/opinions of the USSR) and their views on gender, family, and mobility, to the motivation to study English, future plans, etc.

The majority of female interviewees are teachers (four out of seven), with three of them teaching English, while the majority of male interviewees are IT professionals (three out of five). All the interviewees were connected to the school: eight were students (three females and five males), one was an administrator (female), and three were English teachers (all females). It is important to note that not all eight of the students were attending classes in a regular group setting at the time of the interview. Three of the students attended classes only on Saturdays, which is important to consider for understanding economic status because the school was considerably more expensive than alternative options offered in Khmelnytsky. Students attending biweekly classes during the week had time and money to spend on these lessons, unlike those students only attending Saturday classes, which cost considerably less money and time.

From conversations I had with teachers at the school, their incomes were enough for them to live comfortably and have some left over for travel. Being able to afford to travel both in terms of time and money is a sign that one belongs to the middle class. All interviewees had traveled outside of Ukraine, but some had only been to former Soviet bloc countries, which are more affordable. Travel to Europe is expensive for Ukrainians, so places like Turkey, Egypt, and Sri Lanka that are less costly were mentioned as popular locations. Three of the interviewees participated in the Summer Work and Travel Program in the United States, during which they worked in the service sector (usually resorts and tourist sites) and which provided them with four
months of immersion in the English language and American culture. All three did the program while still university students, with two of them now teaching at the school and one of them, the administrator, with aspirations to be a teacher. The administrator and teachers at the school, including the director, had the highest level of English, which means they were able to convey their thoughts in English easier than others.

The group thus roughly fits the middle-class attributes and standard of living, obtained or aspired for, that Sarah Phillips observed in Ukraine:

These were younger people: some had studied abroad; most had knowledge of foreign languages. They were either working for foreign firms or had started their own small businesses…, buying newly built or renovated apartments and modest foreign cars, taking vacations to exotic places such as South Africa, Egypt, and the United States. They had bank accounts, credit cards, and leisure time. (185)

Foreign language, as well as attributes connected with having access to foreign cultures, such as the opportunity to study abroad and to work for a foreign firm, feature prominently in this description.

Ukraine is a country that has not received substantial research beyond the current political climate, which means that societal issues, such as gender and cultural changes, have been largely ignored in Western scholarship. Understanding how gender and language intersects with the current political climate is vital for the contextualizing my research findings on gender in Ukraine, as well as gendered motives for learning English, which will be discussed in detail in the next two chapters.
Chapter II:
Gender in Ukraine: From Soviet Heritage to Nationalist Revival

In 1991, Ukraine became an independent country requiring political, economic, and social reconstruction after decades of Soviet rule. Everything that former Soviet citizens ever knew was upended, from social welfare benefits to everyday routines. Like other former Soviet states, Ukraine has been undergoing a “quadruple transition,” which includes four changes: “1) from communism to democracy, 2) from planned economy to free market, 3) from being part of an imperial state to building an independent state, and 4) from a suppressed national identity to identity revival” (Kuzio qtd. in Hankivsky and Salnykova 3). This national(ist) revival has been vital for separating Ukraine from its Soviet past. Part of this revival, however, was the reintroduction of traditional gender norms. Yet, gender—a fundamental dimension of social identity, economic transition, and political transformation—has been largely overlooked in the discussion of post-socialist transition in Ukraine following Euromaidan.5

Gender norms and gender studies in today’s Ukraine are a result the interplay between communist-era legacies, on the one hand, and the socio-political and economic changes of the last two decades, on the other. As Ukraine has attempted to distance itself from Soviet vestiges, the very process of nation-building has been fraught with contradictory effects on gender norms. By the 1970s, the Soviet discourse on gender equality and full participation in the workforce began to deteriorate as demographic problems required a focus on women’s maternal role. The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened up the newly independent states both literally and metaphorically. The introduction of the market economy, the ability for people to travel abroad, and greater access to consumer goods and to Western media radically transformed the country.

5 For research on political processes in Ukraine after 2014 see, for example, Karina V. Korostelina, Taras Kuzio, and Daragh McDowell.
Many Western analysts expected this momentum to incorporate the social norms of the West following a shift toward democracy, such as policies on gender, but this was not the case for Ukraine.

Already during Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika, Ukraine experienced an upsurge of nationalist discourses, which often invoked traditional gender roles. For Ukraine, this meant a wave of national-cultural revival of the myth of “mother-Berehynia,” which portrayed ideal women as “a source of inspiration, tenderness, and love, guardians of our homes and our country” (Hankivsky and Salnykova 417). The appeal to a cult figure that in the past existed within a more liberal societal framework that gave women more rights and freedoms has now morphed into a tool for oppression and deception. Berehynia was hence reincarnated as a symbol of these values for the purpose of redefining and reshaping the ideal Ukrainian woman as “pure, maternal, and self-sacrificing” (Hankivsky and Salnykova 9).

With such a narrative, gender issues in Ukraine have been left unaddressed. Progress only began to take shape in the 2000s as gender policy was placed on the governmental agenda. On the international stage, Ukraine signed the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration, thereby proclaiming its intention “to reach an improved gender balance by the year 2015” (Hankivsky and Salnykova, 12). However, this vague declaration did not materialize, mainly due to regressive political elites and Russian aggression that diverted attention away from such societal issues.

---

6 Originally, Berehynia referred to the nymph rusalka, a river and woodland sprite who protected river banks (berehy), and later was ideologized as a pagan goddess who was represent as the domestic Madonna and mother of the nation. Her origins lie in pre-Christian Ukraine and her cult following has continued into modern day Ukraine, featured in radio programs, the press, names of women’s organizations and schools, and literature (Rubchak 150-1).

7 Most notably, in 2010, Viktor Yanukovych, a pro-Russian politician with conservative views on gender, was elected president. His presidency stunted growth in policy development on gender issues until his escape to Russia in 2014 during the Euromaidan.

8 In 2014, the Russian state annexed Crimea and a Russian-fueled war in the Donbas and Luhansk regions of Ukraine broke out.
While there is some push for gender equality in order to align with EU policies in hope of receiving aid and sparking economic growth, the war with Russia is also pushing women’s issues onto the agenda, with large numbers of displaced women. Faced with problems of integration into a new location, these women must also find work. However, in Ukraine until recently 450 professions were banned for women due to claims that they damage women’s health (Shandra). Even if such official discrimination ends, stereotypes of gendered professions and spheres persist. With current threats of the feminization of poverty, violence against women, and growing unemployment and poor health among men, Ukraine is in a binary crisis (Hankivsky and Salnykova, 8). Both men, who face emasculation, and women, who face economic insecurity and violence, are struggling to cope with the gendered crises plaguing modern-day Ukraine. It is no surprise then that many women from Ukraine, Russia and other post-Soviet republics have been searching for partners abroad since the end of the Soviet Union. Jennifer Patico, in her article “Gender and International Matchmaking,” notes that “[Slavic women’s] interest in marrying abroad appears not (just) as a mobility strategy but as a complex commentary on the situation in which fundamental ingredients of a stable and satisfying life are understood to be unattainable, requiring women’s creative, even transnational action” (19).

From this brief discussion on gender in Ukraine, it is clear that women and men are not equal in Ukraine. Furthermore, there is still a lingering lack of respect for women coupled with small, ineffective strides in the government and through NGOs to counter these attitudes. This

---

9 Violence and aggression against women are staggeringly high, with women accounting for 66% of Ukraine’s 1.6 million displaced persons, in addition to chronic gender-based violence in war zones (Van Metre). These displaced women leave everything behind, including their male partners who were their primary breadwinners.

10 This ban was a remnant of Soviet times that still exists in many post-Soviet countries. The fact of the matter is that women were already employed in banned profession but didn’t receive full compensation and benefits for the job they were actually working because they had to officially be employed in another position.
contributes to the sustained, socialized difference between men and women in Ukrainian society and the dismissal of “foreign” concepts like feminism and gender equality.

**Perceptions of Gender and Feminism**

Feminism is primarily associated with Western societies, and feminist scholarship has mostly originated in Western discourse. When applied to societies other than the United States or Europe, gender analysis needs to take into account local history and context. In particular, in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, western NGOs that attempted to address gender issues failed to understand the legacy of Soviet-era gender norms and what Anikó Imre call the “socialist state feminism.” She writes,

> Socialist state feminism meant policies that segregated women into a homogenized social group identified with special needs and tasks (reproduction, family care, and emotional labor) and with inferior skills for political participation (prone to emotional identification, insufficient ability to reason). The flip side of this homogenization was reflected in policies of ‘positive discrimination’ in the form of generous maternity leaves, free child care centers, and reduced-price meals. Following the end of state socialism in the 1990s, such policies were radically reduced if not entirely removed. (190)

In effect, while Soviet ideology proclaimed gender equality as one of its first priorities, socialist state feminism created a systemic and deeply ingrained gender-based social structure, in which the reality for Soviet women was exclusion from “more prestigious jobs, under the assumption that their real duty was to bear children, manage the home, and care for their husbands” (Bilaniuk 53).

Many women in post-Soviet countries are still critical of feminism. First, the view that feminism is a purely Western concept, unfit for the gender constructions of post-socialist societies, has emerged partly out of the belief that socialism provided more security for women through “positive discrimination” than capitalism ever could. Second, they argue that socialist women’s “liberation” led to the “double burden” – women serving the needs of the state in the
public sphere, while also taking care of the household and children in the private sphere. Third, the skepticism of feminist discourse is connected to the validation of femininity and beauty as legitimate forms of cultural capital. When defining femininity, the women that Laada Bilaniuk spoke with in her research on gender and language in Ukraine “stressed weakness, the cultivation of beauty, and nurturing husband and family” (53). This view of femininity has changed in some ways since Bilaniuk conducted her research in the 1990s, but in many ways Ukrainian women still feel obligated to fulfill the roles of a (beautiful) wife, a mother, and a housekeeper.

As Hankivsky and Salnykova found out in their research, resistance to and ignorance of what gender equality actually means exists in all levels of society but is most problematic at the level of political and cultural elites. Many scholars, politicians, and activists hold negative or incorrect views of gender, feminism, and equality. For instance, a male university instructor, interviewed for Hankivsky and Salnykova’s project on gender mainstreaming, exemplified the widespread ignorance of the term ‘gender’ itself: “Since we do not have an equivalent for the word ‘gender’ in the Ukrainian language, we do not have such a problem” (414). This failure to even recognize “gender” as a concept prevents reforms from taking place at any level of society. So ingrained are such views in the Ukrainian society that they are shared by men and women alike. A female activist discussing gender policy and why women are not engaged in politics stated, “Gender policy is not natural for Ukraine. We have a different history; we had Princesses Olha and Anna. Women could always take care of themselves. They don’t go to politics today because their dignity doesn’t fall low enough to engage in it” (qtd. in Hankivsky and Salnykova, 11

---

11 In the 10th and 11th centuries, Princesses Olha and Anna contributed to the prosperity of the Kyivan Rus, and today they are remembered for their strong leadership and contributions. Princess Olha ruled over Kyivan Rus solo when her husband died and contributed to a time of peace and prosperity for the kingdom. Princess Anna married into the French royal family and is notable for her literacy in many languages, which at the time was extremely rare for everyone and even more so for women.
415). To this activist, it is “natural” and historical for women to “take care of themselves” in Ukraine without policies ensuring equality and active participation in government, which the respondent clearly holds in low esteem. The invocation of the legendary princesses aside, references to “natural” differences as a justification for the absence of gender policy occur more than once in the interviewees’ responses (discussed in greater detail later). It is highly problematic that an activist has this view because without supporters, including women\textsuperscript{12}, in government change in policy will not occur.

Outside of academia and politics, mass media from the West, especially the United States, has reached the younger generations of society, but those who primarily watch Russian television series and movies, despite increased suppression of pro-Russian channels since 2014, are exposed to patriarchal views that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes (Hankivsky and Salnykova 418).\textsuperscript{13} In a way, the government is encouraging Ukrainians to be more progressive by limiting access to conservative Russian media and increasing access to more liberal Western media. However, Western media does not have the power to change societal and governmental norms on gender as a whole.

Finally, a further impediment to the implementation of gender equality in Ukraine is the continuing political and economic turmoil, which pushes “the gender agenda” on the back burner, as interviewees’ responses indicate. Thus, economic insecurity, corruption, Russian aggression, and other problems are much more concerning than gender issues for most Ukrainians.

\textsuperscript{12} Before Euromaidan (2013) women’s political participation was at 9.4% and in 2017 it was 12.3% (World Bank).
\textsuperscript{13} For example, in her study of women’s magazines in post-Soviet Russia, Holly Porteous argues that the media “discursively constructs normative femininity via portraying these forms of cultural and aesthetic capital as necessary for women,” relating it both to patriarchal discourses and to cultural globalization in post-Soviet space (2).
Interviewee Responses on Gender

Both male and female interviewees in my project stated that there are no gender problems (such as the wage gap) in Ukraine, but their narratives tell a more complicated story that highlights how gender has been socialized and ingrained in society. Both men and women are acting within a highly gendered and normalized framework created by the state and instilled through myths like Berehynia. As Rubchak points out,

Today, the ancient image of female empowerment continues to beguile many women in Ukraine, seducing them into a false sense of their exalted position, while keeping them bound to their long-standing inferior status...Their widespread acceptance of subordinate roles, and failure to challenge the notion that domestic duties are a woman’s exclusive domain, testifies to the effectiveness of such socialization. (158)

This acceptance of subordination is compounded by the belief that this is how gender roles have always been in Ukraine and how it should always will be. Therefore, there is a lack of resistance to the gender norms that largely have not been challenged in the post-Soviet and post-Euromaidan Ukraine.

Gendered Professions and the Wage Gap

In general, interviewees believe that a “natural” difference between men and women exists, which has led them to resist any acknowledgement that there is a problem in how gendered spheres have been constructed. One male interviewee, Oleg, said, “Of course, you will not see a lot of women working in a car workshop because it’s work connected to physical effort, and usually men are more capable of doing this kind of physical labor.” Similarly, Nazar claimed that teaching was better suited for women because it is a “brain job” that doesn’t require them to “lift boxes or something like this.” He believes that physical labor is harder and superior to a female profession like teaching: “It’s easier to speak or learn or teach someone instead of making a hard-physical job, for example.” Without knowing it, Nazar is speaking through a highly
gendered and socialized mindset. Another man, Denis, stated, “It is natural that men have more muscles and are stronger, in general, than women, so they can do harder jobs like construction, moving things, but in other areas for example in education, in teaching, I think it’s equal. But maybe it’s easier, more natural for women to take this profession.” This claim equates physical labor with a profession with a higher level of difficulty, which is to say that physical labor, men’s labor, is superior to women’s. Notably, when discussing matters of gender, men often demonstrate a persistent desire to beat around the bush so as to avoid saying anything overtly sexist. The argument of “natural differences” between men and women provides a convenient objective framework for the rest of their statements that are presented as shared, “common-sense” conclusions.

Paradoxically, women likewise refused to recognize how their position is shaped by the patriarchal structure they live under, even when their actual experience bore testimony to it. Marina, for example, denied that her profession as a computer science teacher was gendered despite it being dominated by males: “I don’t think that it’s maybe connected with some gender…I don’t know why there is this bias that the computer science teacher must be only man, but I am the only woman.” While she refers to gender bias surrounding computer science and admits that she is an exception, she somehow generalizes her personal success in this profession, claiming that “it depends on the person.”

Teaching is assumed to be a female profession, but it is important to consider how teaching different subjects is gendered within this profession. For instance, teaching foreign languages, unlike computer science, is viewed as female. However, an English teacher at the school, Svitlana, claimed that occupations are not gendered, and everyone

---

14 Incidentally, the phrase “it depends” occurs multiple times in each interview. While sometimes it serves as a linguistic shortcut, helping with a complex idea in a foreign language, at other times it indicated a mild refusal to express an opinion.
can do whatever they want. These statements by women demonstrate how the “false sense of
their exalted position”—both as a legacy of Soviet state feminism and an outcome of Ukrainian
nationalist discourse—has shaped their lives and the perceptions of gender norms.

Often the interviewees used essentialist claims of “natural” differences between men and
to soften their responses. For example, Svitlana, who is an English teacher at the school,
recognized that there is a difference in the level of participation from men and women in her
classes: “In my groups, women are more active than men. There is one man who is very active,
but the others are passive. I mean women in life are more impulsive, emotional. That’s why I
guess they are more active in class.” Interestingly, Svitlana felt that her answer labeling men as
more passive was too strong, so she added an explanation—by appealing to women’s “natural”
impulsivity and emotionality.

Svitlana’s statement emphasizes that at least in the classroom women are reversing
traditional gender roles by being more active. However, another teacher, Anastasia, disagreed
with this assessment. For Anastasia, teenage girls are more active learners than teenage boys, but
into adulthood this dynamic changes:

I think that the problem is that women are busier with family, with childcare, and men
have more free time…That’s why when they are older, they don’t have enough time for
that. But what about teenagers? Girls mature earlier, and they understand the importance
of learning the language earlier. That’s why in my teenage groups, the girls are much
better than the boys.

Anastasia seems to ascribe the decrease in women’s participation to gender roles but without
directly stating that as the cause and assuming this to be gender normative. According to her,
despite being more motivated, with age young women become preoccupied with homemaking
and childrearing and hence lose the ability and time to maintain this motivation to learn.
Regardless of whether men or women are more passive or active in the classroom or have more
time to learn, what these statements demonstrate is how gender has been conceptualized in Ukraine as a natural phenomenon. Ukrainian gender norms are thus based on an essentialist argument for gender rather than a constructivist one.

While most interviewees denied the existence of gender inequality in Ukraine, the strategies of dealing with this question varied. One rather common pattern was to anticipate the interviewer’s—the American woman’s—objections. Some interviewees displaced the issue to the West, arguing that Ukraine does not have a gender wage gap like the United States and Europe. One man, Oleg, explained that the wage gap is purely a western concept:

Here in Soviet [sic] countries, we have a bit of a different situation because, for example, as I know in the United States or in Europe, female workers for the same job could get less money, but here in Ukraine, it doesn’t matter if you are man or woman. You will get the same salary. Only reason that really is important is your professional skill...And there are a lot of these situations. I personally know these people. They are female workers, and they get more money for the same job because they are more skilled.

This statement highlights how gender issues in general are brushed aside as western problems that do not affect post-Soviet countries. Interestingly, this response was an answer to an entirely different question: the differences between what men and women want to get out of learning the English language. Instead, the interviewee felt it was necessary to offer his opinion on the wage gap. He did it in a tone of authority and knowledge about how things are done “here”—in Ukraine and other “Soviet countries.” The use of “Soviet” instead of “post-Soviet” is an interesting slip, perhaps invoking socialist state feminism. While Oleg is 21 years old and has no direct experience of living in the USSR, in his eyes the discourse still provides validation for his claim of gender equality in Ukraine. He wanted to clear up any misconceptions that I, a young American woman asking questions about gender in his country, might have. In his answer, he

---

15 According to the Global Gender Gap Report for 2018, Ukraine has a gender wage gap of $.70 meaning for every $1 a man makes, women earn only $.70 for the same work (World Economic Forum 281).
provides *concrete* evidence from his own experiences that women *can be* paid more than men, so therefore, in his country no gender wage gap exists. Men, however, are not alone in their resistance to acknowledging gender problems. For instance, Marina claimed, “We are gender equal and the salary doesn’t depend on gender. Women can earn more than men, and it’s okay.” Their understanding of the wage gap is based on individual people’s experiences, leading it to not be seen as a systemic issue.

The other strategy of dealing with “uncomfortable” questions about gender was to provide semi-ironic, semi-defensive responses that suggest that the interviewees are aware of feminism and gender issues but resist their relevance in their society. On two separate occasions the question of whether men or women had an easier time learning languages elicited not a direct answer but rather a comment on the interviewer’s assumed bias in asking the question: “OK, let me be more tolerant. Yeah, women are more successful in learning some languages,” and “It is a cruel question…For example, if you are feministic, you might be offended by my answer.” These responses by two of the male interviewees, along with those of other interviewees, demonstrate that they know exactly what feminists and people from other countries, like me, think about gender. They may not like these diverging opinions or want to admit they exist, but they are aware of them.

The idea that gendered problems do not exist in Ukraine also has to do with the economic problems that affect the majority of the population. Svitlana, for example, recognized that gender inequality might be a problem, but then claimed that low wages are a problem for everyone, not just women, and thus take priority:

I don’t think it’s a problem because Ukrainians are all in a bad situation because the government doesn’t respect us. We get very little money. So, if they would do something with the living conditions, with how much people earn, maybe there would be such a
problem. I don’t know. We have just regular problems here with conditions of life and with salaries.

Svitlana admits that she is unsure of her answer while at the same time asserting that gender wage gap is an advanced problem that comes after solving “regular problems.” This statement confirms Rubchak’s conclusion that “the lingering shadow of the now defunct Soviet icon of the ‘women who can do it all’” and the reestablished traditional gender norms had led to the belief that feminism is mainly an elite concern or irrelevant to people’s lives (Rubchak 158).

Interviewees mentioned the Soviet legacy as a reason for conservatism that still persists in society, but they failed to recognize how nation-building itself after independence reinforced what was acceptable.

*Body Image*

An area where the women interviewed were more aware of how gender plays a role was body image. For instance, Svitlana acknowledges that there are different expectations for how men and women should present themselves: “Of course, maybe we are used to the fact that women can and should wear miniskirts and open tops. Maybe at this point it’s a bigger problem for women because you know men, even when they want to look nice, they can wear just shorts and a T-shirt, that’s it.” This statement suggests an understanding that society is used to men and women behaving and dressing a certain way, which places greater burden and attention on women than on men. However, Svitlana’s use of “can and should” makes it unclear how she feels about it. While she is aware of how gender norms affect body image and how people present themselves, her opinion on body image itself is left ambiguous. In fact, she and other
interviewees explained that health is the primary reason why people should care about their weight.\textsuperscript{16}

On the other hand, Anastasia believed it to be more a craze or fad than a matter of health. She explained, “Yeah, in fact, Ukrainians are crazy about their appearance and people are crazy about clothes, about maintaining a nice body. And that’s why gyms are very popular nowadays. In fact, in our city, almost everybody goes to the gym, or like to some fitness classes, and studies foreign languages.” This generalized statement about Ukrainians in her city is very bold; unlike other interviewees, Anastasia did not try to escape making such claims. What is also remarkable about this statement is that the interviewee lists preoccupation with body image next to studying foreign languages, suggesting, perhaps, a particular construction of a culturally validated lifestyle or identity that makes one at least appear to be part of the cultured middle class. Physical fitness thus becomes a sign of a modern, successful person, adding to the profile of a new Ukrainian middle class as described by Phillips (184-185). Despite explaining why people should care about body image or why Ukrainians do care so much about it, she does not discuss it as a problem for their society. Even the issue of the exoticization of Ukrainian women (for example, on international dating sites) appears in the interviews in the context of being able to leave the country easier through marriages to foreigners, rather than as a societal problem. While interviewees recognized that body image is gendered because it places more pressure on women, they did not see it as problematic, which aligns with their broader views on gender issues in Ukraine.

\textsuperscript{16} This is something Svitlana believes is unique to Ukrainians because what she saw in the United States was very different than what she was used to. She described her shock at how people could be so “happy” and yet unconcerned about their appearance or size.
Family Norms and Western Media

Several interviewees claimed that Western media, especially American TV shows and movies, have created a rift between generations. In the Soviet Union, sex was a taboo topic, and older generations still remain conservative on such issues. Irina, for example, noted that her mother never talked to her about sex or periods, but now her nephew is growing up in another universe: “The difference between generations, like this gap, is just huge because [young people] are growing up watching American TV shows…And it’s just a totally different world. They are still living in the same country, Ukraine, but it’s different.”

Most interviewees believed that Western social norms and the media to be beneficial to the future of Ukraine’s societal development despite generational disparities that they foster. For example, Oleg believes that family norms will continue to become more liberal as more connections with the West are made: “We [Ukrainians] from year to year become more developed...So I think that maybe not in 10 years, maybe in 20 or 30 years, our families will be more liberal and move away from the conservative heritage of the Soviet Union.”

However, Oksana saw the western infiltration as negative because it is causing too much change in the traditional family structure—the idea which she emphasized through a striking essentialist claim:

By nature, women create families, they have children, and they look after children. Men they go to the forest, hunt the animals, but now women and men work. I am confused. I don’t know why so many women remain single now. I think it is something with men...Maybe they get these ideas of free relationships from films. It’s not a very good example because when women at the age of 30 aren’t married want to have family, they can’t find a man who wants to be married. They want to be in free relationships.

As discussed earlier, the appeal to “nature” as an explanation of women’s and men’s different social roles occurs quite frequently in the interviews. But in the quote above it has little to do with an actual belief in essentialist ideas of gender norms. It is rather indicative of the perception
of shift in traditional social norms that range from women supporting themselves to the changing interpersonal relationships.

By blaming western media, Oksana removes any responsibility from the government or the patriarchal structure of society. Rather, in her account, external forces, such as the United States and Europe, are forcing Ukraine to change in ways that are not natural. In her statement, women are static and traditional, while men have changed, which maintains the image of women as the bearers of national culture, identity, and tradition. Unlike female interviewees who had lived abroad or considered living abroad, Sofia was against leaving Ukraine: “I think that if you were born in this land, then this land needs your help to improve.” Her statement resonates with the image of women as the bearers of national identity, as “the nation’s Berehynia,” where individual identity is subsumed by the collective national one.

Irrespective of how media may be reshaping Ukrainian family norms and the persistence of traditional values among many Ukrainians, some women are pushing back against this image of the matriarch, which constrains them to the private sphere. After all, as these young women’s educational backgrounds, occupations, and plans for the future suggest (discussed in Chapter III), they are far from passive homemakers. Both men and women are becoming increasingly open to opportunities of globalization that has brought with it Western media and the English language, which allows them to engage with other cultures. On the other hand, these foreign concepts have placed a strain on Ukraine’s cultural norms, especially between generations.

As Oksana mentions above, there has been a shift in the family structure and marital norms: people marry and start families later; more women enter the workforce; and spouses share more responsibilities within the home. Marina explained her view, “Actually, I don’t think that women have to stay home with the family. Maybe yes for some time but both parents have
to work and to earn money, to raise their kids. A lot of women think that they have to sit at home, like a sit-at-home parent, and the man has to bring home the bacon.” In this progressive statement, she recognizes that many women in Ukraine still believe that the private sphere is a woman’s place and expresses a dissenting opinion from the societal norm. Conversely, Denis, stated that families have changed, but failed to display how his family has transformed:

Of course, it changed with time. But for instance, in our family, I help my wife to wash dishes, to clean our house, to do other things, and in contrast, I have a lawn in the backyard of my house. I do that by myself. But my wife does different things for instance she drops the children off at English school, she goes with them to the doctor, etc.

Soon after this interview, this family was migrating to Canada for Denis’ work. When asked whether the wife would also work in this new setting, he said she will look for a part-time job and be responsible for the kids in the afternoon. There is a clear dynamic in this family that maintains the traditional family and gender roles. While Denis, the oldest interviewee, understood that family norms were changing over time, his views remain more conservative and tied to the traditional family structure.

On the other hand, Irina talked openly about her own and her society’s views of an often-controversial topic:

For me, if my daughter is lesbian for example or my son is gay, I am sure that I will have no problem with that nor will my husband... Everybody knows that attitude of Putin, yeah? To gays and lesbians, I would say that Ukraine still has people that think the same way. Usually they are like older generation because from the religious point of view they justify this… I think that still we have this problem in our society, not so huge like in Russia. But I think we have a lot of people who probably are lesbian or gay, but they don’t speak about it.

According to Irina, generational differences, religious beliefs, and homophobia are major factors in the maintenance of more traditional family and gender norms in Ukrainian society. She

---

17 Irina makes a valid distinction between Ukraine and Russia in terms of LGBT rights. In 2013 Russia adopted an anti-gay law, banning loosely defined “gay propaganda” under the excuse of protecting children and “family
believes that the older generations are the ones driving this conservatism as opposed to younger
generations that are more exposed to Western media and discourses.

Interviewees thus present a fairly typical range of responses on the issues of gender. Some cite economic insecurity that takes precedence over gender inequality; others claim that the latter has been “overcome” as a result of Soviet-era state feminism or resist the very questions about gender roles. Patriarchal gender stereotypes are largely normalized among women as well. On the other hand, as Chapter III will argue, the women’s lived experience complicates this traditionalist picture. Not only were the respondents highly educated, professional women, some well-traveled, they also displayed a remarkable versatility and awareness of the place of the English language in their identity, both as a practical tool of social and economic mobility and as a part of symbolic/cultural capital.

While the freedoms associated with capitalism have benefited men more than women in Ukraine, the opportunities for expressing self-worth through language skills has encouraged women to pursue English language education for self-fulfilling purposes, compared to the more practical motives of men. Until now, gender, a major factor in the matrix of motivations for learning English, has been largely ignored in this type of research. In the next chapter, I will address this omission through the analysis of interviewee responses to questions related to motivations for learning English and explore how societal constructions have contributed to gender differences.

values.” People in the LGBT community in Russia frequently face threats and violence, especially in the Muslim republics such as Chechnia.
Chapter III:  
The Intersections of Gender and Motives for Learning English  

The Place of the English Language in the Late Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Countries: Continuities and Changes  

With the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev initiated a series of wide-reaching reforms in virtually all spheres of Soviet life, from relative political de-Stalinization and a liberalization of cultural policies to an overhaul of the Soviet educational system. In particular, Khrushchev charged the Ministry of Education with the task of fostering school curriculum, which would produce a workforce with more practical and technical training (Garza 17). The Soviet Union was gradually opening up to the outside world, with several major events symbolizing the change, such as the World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957 and the American National Exhibition in 1959, both held in Moscow. Soon after, in May 1961, the Central Committee of the CPSU issued a decree “On the Improvement of the Study of Foreign Languages,” which stated that “in the condition of a considerable rise in the USSR’s international relations, the knowledge of foreign languages by specialists of various branches of science, technology and culture, as well as the broader public, acquires particular importance” (“Ob uluchshenii”).

Included in these reforms were specialized schools for foreign language study. Both the quality and the quantity of instruction in specialized schools (4-5 times a week, with some subjects taught entirely in English) provided an intensive study environment that was designed to ensure “a practical mastery by the students of foreign languages” (“Ob uluchshenii”). Among those who benefitted from the state support of foreign language education was the generation which Donald Raleigh in his collective memory study calls “the Soviet baby boomers” and who were in grade school in the late 1950s. Vladimir Prudkin, Class of 1967 at School No. 20
Moscow, explained the appeal of foreign language education: “Stalin left the scene and shortly thereafter the so-called Thaw [the period of Khrushchev’s reforms] began. It’s as if the realization of the need for contacts with the outside world arose, and most likely my parents understood that even a minimal knowledge of a foreign language was necessary” (79). No less important than the growing practical use of foreign languages was their prestige: getting one’s son or daughter into a specialized school was a sign of an educated, modern outlook.

As I argue in this chapter, the motivations to study foreign languages in today’s Ukraine show both signs of continuity with the Soviet period and signs of change. On the one hand, English language proficiency is still rather limited in Ukraine. In the 2018 global English proficiency ranking, Russia and Ukraine occupy the forty second and forty third places respectively, far behind Sweden and the Netherlands, or even Poland (“EF English”). Even though Ukraine is geographically closer to Western Europe than Russia, during the Soviet period and even now, it has had very limited contacts with English-speaking Westerners (Ustinova 241). In contrast, Poland, Hungary, and Serbia have much higher levels of proficiency. One of the interviewees, Tatiana, who has a Serbian boyfriend, claimed that this difference is due to the fact that these countries do not dub English-language movies but rather subtitle them. This gives the citizens of these countries exposure to English and allows them to hear natives speaking English.\footnote{Foreign films were usually dubbed into Russian in the USSR, and this tradition continues in Russia and Ukraine to this day. The exceptions are film festivals, which screen films with subtitles.}

Economic reasons also play a role. As I mentioned in Chapter I, the tuition at the school is rather sizeable, which makes it out of reach for many people and contributes to the social status and cultural prestige of the language.
On the other hand, the ways in which young people acquire and use languages, as well as how they think and speak of themselves in connection with foreign languages have little in common with the Soviet past. As the world became a little more open to Soviet citizens, the need for language skills, especially in English, grew, but access to native speakers of those languages and to quality education remained limited (at least in the early years) to the privileged few. Most language schools were located in major cities (such as Moscow and Kiev); even more importantly, education, jobs, travel and the media were state-apportioned and state-controlled.

With practically no chance for students to live and work in the United States or any of the Western countries that were considered the USSR’s opponents in the Cold War, English skills were almost exclusively utilized for instrumental reasons. Raleigh lists five such reasons that his interviewees mentioned: becoming a teacher of English, reading academic articles for work, communicating with foreigners as a diplomat, using English for communication while traveling abroad, and immigrating to an English-speaking country (Raleigh 190). Immigration aside, the latter three paths were open only to the privileged few, mainly children of high-positioned Soviet party and government officials. In contrast, now there is much greater access to such opportunities. Figure 2 (below) shows counties visited by the interviewees in my research, who live outside of Ukraine’s major metropolitan areas.

---
19 Since WWII, English became the most popular foreign language in the USSR. Garza notes, for example, that in the mid-1980s, there were almost one hundred specialized foreign language schools in Moscow. Over half of those were specialized in English (Garza 1-2).
20 For example, Vladimir Prudkin quoted above is the son of a renowned Soviet film and theater actor, Mark Prudkin, one of the pillars of Soviet stage art. The family was extremely well positioned and enjoyed many perks the system provided. As Raleigh’s study shows, admission to these specialized language schools, especially in early years, was given primarily to children of privileged parents or children of intelligentsia, meaning that cultural capital was passed through birthright (70).
The specialized foreign language schools still exist and remain popular in countries like Russia and Ukraine. Now, however, there are other ways for students to gain English-language skills beyond these exclusive schools, with the growth of foreign language learning centers, community college type classes, and the Internet. In the Soviet era, the opportunities to learn foreign language skills were limited due to travel restrictions and access to quality language education, but today, there are many options for people of all ages to learn English.\textsuperscript{21} Since the fall of the “Iron Curtain” and Ukraine’s independence, the country has opened up its borders for

\textsuperscript{21} Unfortunately, chances to learn English in a native environment are limited for Ukrainians because they need a visa to enter the United States and the United Kingdom, which are difficult to obtain. Despite frustrations with visa rejections voiced by numerous interviewees, there is still a desire to go to English speaking countries to learn more about the culture.
foreign investment and travel, and its citizens got access to exchange programs and study abroad opportunities.

With the introduction of the Internet, English-language content became easily accessible around the world, and English proficiency became an even more desired skill. Since the fall of communism and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, former socialist countries and Soviet republics have followed different paths vis-à-vis their engagement with English.\textsuperscript{22} In Ukraine, — historically a bilingual (Ukrainian and Russian) country with close cultural ties to Russia and until 2014 under Russia’s control politically—English is not really competing with Russian for dominance; English is a foreign language that is learned, not acquired, in Ukraine, penetrating the country through instruction, business, media and popular culture, and tourism.

The events of 2014 have contributed to the pro-Western stance taken by the government and by many Ukrainians. Security from Russian aggression is a priority for Ukraine and its neighbors, notably Poland and the Baltics. As Ukraine becomes more integrated with Europe, the hope for many Ukrainians is that they will be more secure economically and politically. The English language has taken a prominent spot in discussions on educational reform and the future of Ukraine. Therefore, English language proficiency acquires urgency both on the instrumental level and the symbolic level. Interestingly, in Bilaniuk’s research “women find English more attractive and valuable than Ukrainian” (72), which may be the result of Ukrainian not having a level of prestige beyond the national identity. In this case, women seem to place individual identity above nationalism.

\textsuperscript{22} One common feature is that the Russian language has lost considerable leverage as a means of intercultural communication, which it had held since World War II. In Estonia, for example, “English has acquired the symbolic value of rescue from a communist regime and is believed to enable the country to fully integrate in the European Union” (Ustinova 240).
This urgency is apparent, for example, in how the interviewees responded to the question about their children learning foreign languages. All the interviewees were certain that their children would know English. Interestingly, the women explained that they would teach their children multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and German, while men discussed only the necessity of learning English for better jobs. This has remained constant since the time the Soviet baby boomers were raising their children. As Olga Gorelik from Raleigh’s study explained, “Our children are very free. They’re really communicative. Computers are their reference books. They never leave the Internet, and over the Internet chat with people throughout the world. They have their own point of view on absolutely everything” (Raleigh 346). As Gorelik acknowledges, computers opened the world to their children, bringing with them various perspectives and new ways of communicating. While the Internet has driven a rift between the generations on many issues, such as gender norms and traditions, it has also connected people among countries in ways never possible before. The parents in post-Soviet countries, then and now, recognize that times are changing from the Soviet isolation they remember to what their children experience and see today both in person and on the Internet in the globalized world.

The Virtual English-Language World and Its Influence on Ukrainian Society

With the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s and the growth of streaming sites both legal and illegal, English-language TV shows and films have become increasingly accessible and popular across the globe. In the Soviet Union, audiences had very limited exposure to Western popular culture. By the 1990s, Ukrainian and Russian TV viewers alike got access to a wide variety of films and TV shows, both contemporary and classic, from Rambo to Santa Barbara and Latin American telenovelas. Dubbed (often badly) into Russian, these films quenched the
viewers’ thirst for the forbidden fruit of Western movies and images of foreign life but provided no opportunities for hearing native speech.

In post-socialist countries today, American movies and TV shows continue to be very popular, especially among younger generations. What has changed now is not only the easy availability of content—dubbed, subtitled or neither—but also the more nuanced differentiation of viewing preferences. Younger adults and children have greater access to information and media than any previous generations, which will have an impact on the future of Ukraine as new conceptions of identity, gender, and family continue to spread and take hold.

Mary Beth Oliver, in her article on media genres and gender, concluded that “the he said-she said debate” over what to watch “should not be seen as a commonplace example of the war between the sexes, but rather a manifestation of the complexities of biological and cultural forces that lead her to the melodramas and him to the action adventures” (230). Certainly not all men and women fit this narrow dichotomy, which appears to be confirmed more by male interviewees than by female in this research. I asked the interviewees what kinds of TV shows and movies they liked to watch (full list by genre in Appendix I). As Figure 3 (below) shows, among the 44 titles mentioned (all U.S. or British productions)23, the most popular genre was drama (12) followed by fantasy/sci-fi (11). The next most popular genre, comedy, includes Friends, mentioned by five interviewees. Fantasy/sci-fi received the most equal number of responses, five from men and six from women, which suggests that these types of shows interest both genders.

---

23 Titles mentioned by more than one interviewee were counted each time.
Excluded from this graphic are *The Big Bang Theory* and *Modern Family* because they were screened weekly at the school as part of the curriculum.\(^{24}\) The use of these shows for regular instruction, however, is quite striking in and of itself. *Modern Family*, especially, deals with such issues as sexual diversity and the changing ideas of what constitutes a family. By hosting viewings of these shows that showcase western norms and ideas, the school was acting as a liberal educator within a more traditional society. Nevertheless, I decided to exclude these shows from the analysis of responses because the interviewees did not “choose” to watch them.

For the male interviewees, fantasy/sci fi and historical were the most popular genres mentioned, as can be seen in Figure 4 (below), with almost 38.5% (five out of thirteen) of the titles named falling into each of these categories. The genres included in this pie chart are considered to be gender normative for men, in contrast to drama or romantic comedies, which is

---

\(^{24}\) The school had a viewing of one episode of *Modern Family*, followed by one episode of *Big Bang Theory* every Saturday. The students would watch the episode with an English teacher who would pause the shows when a student had a question about what was said or to check their comprehension. In addition, the students received a short glossary of difficult or obscure words, idioms, and phrases from the shows.
often thought of as female genres (Oliver 222). The one drama title that male interviewees mentioned was *House of Cards*, which is a political drama rather than a romantic or soap opera type drama, preferred by women. Notably, no men mentioned titles that fall into the romantic comedy’s genre, which was expected, given the gender assumptions behind this genre. Overall, the titles mentioned by men were highly concentrated in the fantasy/sci fi and historical genres.

*Figure 4*

The women, on the other hand, listed titles more evenly distributed across genres (see Figure 5 below). Drama was the most popular genre, followed by fantasy/sci-fi and romantic comedies. These dramas included political ones, like *Handmaid’s Tale*, and romantic ones, like *The Notebook*. The diversity in the titles mentioned across various genres suggests that there is less of a stigma around what the female interviewees watch or admitted to watching, compared to the male interviewees’ responses. This means that the women were exposed collectively to a greater variety of content, which suggests greater openness to diverse creative ideas.
Two interviewees, Denis and Marina, told me that they do not watch any TV shows beyond those required by the school. Denis explained that working at a computer all day strains his eyes and so watching something is not enjoyable. Marina simply did not enjoy watching television. She even said about *Modern Family* and *Big Bang Theory*, “I don’t like such humor. It’s a little bit stupid. It’s a good way to practice listening skills, and it’s just an English lesson.” For her, watching English-language television is purely a practical matter, but the lack of enjoyment in these shows and TV shows in general was not shared by the rest of the interviewees. However, her distaste in American humor highlights how these shows and movies do not always resonate with foreign audiences. For example, Tatiana explained,

> When you watch the American movies, you just see that their life is different. They have different relations in the family and different ways of thinking about some things…When I was younger, I liked these TV shows because I was like looking at this American life that we didn’t have at all. It was not similar at all, like this going to school, the schools are different.

According to her, American lives portrayed in these productions have little in common with life in Ukraine. However, it is clear from her answer that Tatiana equated the lives portrayed with
American reality, rather than seeing it as a genre formula. This means that American productions play a vital role in shaping perspectives and stereotypes that Ukrainian audiences hold of Americans and America. Notably, most of the shows and movies mentioned are both gender normative and heteronormative meaning they are not necessarily expanding preexisting conceptions of gender, but the topics covered, like sex, are more progressive and open.

One sitcom that received particular attention was *Friends*. This is the show that appealed to the most interviewees, five of them (two men and three women), which they attributed to its simple, conversational English, funny characters, and enjoyable plotline. When interviewees were asked who they related to most on the show, Chandler was the most popular answer for men for his humor, and Rachel was the most popular for women because she resonated most with them. The relatability of the characters on *Friends* indicates that they have a certain universality, but this does not extend to things like their living standard, careers, and love lives.

While the interviewees did not go into great detail about who they identify with in the shows and why, one aspect did elicit interesting responses: the idea that American women are promiscuous. This view seems to have originated in the openness of American productions to the inclusion of sex scenes, conversations about sex, and characters with multiple partners. For instance, Sofia loved the TV show *Sex and the City* but when asked which character she likes best, she admitted that she was uncomfortable with how many partners Carrie Bradshaw had on the show. Given the title of this show, sex plays a pivotal role in the lives of the four women. While Sofia did not relate to any particular character on the show, she did not express any discomfort in watching it despite sex being a major theme. To her, the topic was not an issue per se, but the number of different partners was, which aligns with the traditional norm of having a
monogamous relationship. At the same time, Sofia did not consider sex scenes as something shameful or taboo.

Conversely, Irina observed about the show *Shameless*, “It’s a little bit too much, you know, of sex and everything, but it’s also very funny. I watched all the seasons, but my husband he recommended this [show] to me.” Despite the show making her uncomfortable, she watched the entire series. Also interesting is that her husband recommended it and that she felt it necessary to mention this fact, which could be seen as explaining that she had his permission to watch the show or a statement that the husband, too, had watched it. This hesitancy and discomfort about relating to characters and watching these programs is, perhaps, founded in the more traditional social and gender norms that have persisted in Ukraine and, as Chapter II argues, have been propagated as part of Ukraine’s national(ist) revival. At the same time, since Euromaidan and Ukraine’s (however hesitant) westward orientation there has been an increased interest in Europe and the United States, which has placed pressure on both formal and informal institutions maintaining these norms.

Younger generations raised in post-Soviet Ukraine are experiencing a world immeasurably different than that of their parents and grandparents. Even without moving out of their country or even city, they can engage with people from all over the world through social media sites and be a part of the global community, which, as it stands today, requires the English language. The ubiquity of English-language media has created more avenues for students to feel the pressure of the Ought-to Self, while simultaneously exposing them to various ideas of who they could be, beyond their local community and country.

**Motivations for the Study of English: From the Ought-to L2 Self to the Ideal L2 Self**

As students grow up and begin to make life decisions, they build their own identity. Part of this shift involves the decision of whether to continue learning English beyond the mandatory
school curriculum. At first, students meet the expectations placed on them by their parents, their teachers, and their government, which Dörnyei labels as the Ought-to L2 Self (Tokar 8). Several interviewees, in fact, started learning English even before grade school. For example, Tatiana explained that her English language education started in kindergarten and that her mother forced her to learn it. At such a young age, kids lack the motivation to learn English and do not understand its place in Ukraine or the broader world. On top of this, the language instruction they receive in secondary school is often based in rote memorization, which has remained since the Soviet era. Many of the interviewees explained that early English language education, while mandatory in Ukraine, is low quality. For instance, Irina stated, “At school they teach us to read, to translate, to understand. We don’t speak a lot.” Therefore, in order to actually be able to speak, students have to make the decision on their own later in life, or the parents can pay for specialized lessons, like those available at school. The exception is those who attend specialized schools for English education, like Yaroslav, who was a former student of school number one in Khmelnitsky. Regardless of whether English skills were built up in school, as adults, people must have a continued motivation to learn the language that is based more in personal goals than in mandatory curriculum. Indeed, it is striking how unanimously the interviewees claimed renewed interest to English “in the past several years.” Whether or not directly linked to the post-Maidan sense of national revival and hopes for euro-integration, at a minimum the drive to acquire proficiency in English originates in the desire for economic and social mobility. All the interviewees manifested the shift from the Ought-to L2 Self to the Ideal L2 Self as a moment when they began to “seriously” start learning English, with the exception of Yaroslav, who claimed that due to his specialized schooling he has always learned English “seriously.”
distinction between these “selves “in relation to English demarcates the change in motivations for continuing to learn English as an adult: away from parental expectations or educational requirements and towards more personal motivations. The latter range from work, travel, and migration to the sense of individual fulfillment. An example of this shift is found in Denis’ experience:

Well, my father and mother, when I was young, when I attended school, they forced me to learn English. I was not thinking that this was too important for me. But I used to hear my parents, to take good advice...and yes, I started to learn English and thanks to the computers, I think I had an adequate level...but seriously I started to improve my English 2 years and a half [ago] when I needed to pass IELTS\(^{22}\) exam.

Denis’s motivation went through several stages: from parental encouragement to a desire to understand computers to passing an exam. All three of these, however, belong more to the Ought-to L2 Self model, rather than the Ideal L2 Self model, because learning English was always about reaching a specific practical goal—a rite of passage to something else, as was true of all the male interviewees.

This individual desire rather than societal or career pressure was more pronounced in the responses of the women. Female interviewees provided more diverse answers for why they started “seriously” learning as adults, rather than just thoughts about future careers or gaining economic capital. For example, Sofia and Oksana do not even use English in their careers and started improving their English purely to communicate with people from other countries. Marina was similarly motivated to improve when she met foreigners who all spoke English. While she still enjoys traveling and meeting new people while using English, her motivation for improving

\(^{22}\) The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is used worldwide to test English proficiency for higher education, migration, and work. Proficiency is measured in bands 1-9 (non-user to expert). Although not the same as the CEFR ranking used by many interviewees and the school, someone who ranks in the A range for the CEFR would expect to get an IELTS score of 1-3, someone in the B range would expect 4-6, and someone in the C range would expect 7-9 (“Common”).
has expanded to include economic reasons, as she needs it for work as a computer science teacher and for an application for a PhD program that required a higher level of English. The three teachers found their love of English even earlier, as Svitlana and Anastasia became interested in grade school and Irina at the university.

What evolves from this transition toward personal choice to learn English as an adult is the Ideal L2 Self, which often has its roots in the individual motivation to achieve both economic and cultural capital with greater focus on the cultural rather than the economic. Oleg highlights how speaking English translates into cultural capital: “[Proficiency in English] in the past few years has become necessary passage for everybody. It’s international language. If you know English, it means that you are a sort of educated person. So, I think it is a must-have skill.” According to Oleg, those who speak English are perceived to be more cultured and have more potential for both social and economic mobility. All interviewees echoed this idea of English as the “international language.” However, what each individual interviewee did with this skill and why they were motivated to improve it varied by gender.

The participants’ majors and careers confirm the gendered split of the L2 Self is evident. While the responses of both the women and the men about why they study English were as I predicted, with men primarily motivated by instrumental factors and women motivated by more communicative and identity-focused factors, there is a contrast in what the women said about traditional gender norms in Ukraine (as discussed in Chapter II) and what their educational background and employment convey. Not only are the women highly educated and independent, but they are also more ambitious and self-aware, as the discussion of their engagement with English demonstrates. All twelve of the interviewees held at least a bachelor’s degree; six of
them had master’s degrees (five held by women), and two (both women) were in the process of obtaining a PhD (See Table 1).

*Table 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrii</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Analytics and Interpreting</td>
<td>Owns web designing business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oleg</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Sales manager at a bridal shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denis</td>
<td>Bachelor’s/Master’s: Computer Engineering</td>
<td>Programmer; moving to Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazar</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Logistics</td>
<td>Unemployed; plans to work on cruise ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaroslav</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Information Technology</td>
<td>Owns advertisement company and internet café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: International Relations; Master’s: English Translation</td>
<td>English teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and International Relations; PhD in progress: Methodology of Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irina</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Management, Psychology, and English Philology Master’s:</td>
<td>Director of the School; Spanish, English,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Bachelor’s/Master’s: Computer Science and IT; working on a PhD</td>
<td>Computer Science teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oksana</td>
<td>Bachelor’s/Master’s: Chemistry</td>
<td>Manager of Water Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Graphic Design</td>
<td>Graphic Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svitlana</td>
<td>Bachelor’s/Master’s: English Methodology and translation (German and</td>
<td>English teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana</td>
<td>Bachelor’s: Tourism</td>
<td>Part-time administrator at school and hotel;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>unsure about future career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparatively, the men are less educated, and have a less expansive knowledge collectively. All five of the men majored in STEM fields, which is gender normative. The women’s specialties, in contrast, show a greater variation: from STEM to International Relations to hospitality. Women are thus not limiting themselves to female-dominated majors and see practical value in obtaining a graduate degree in their field. While men may also see value in a master’s or PhD, only one of them possessed such a degree, and none mentioned that they were pursuing graduate studies. This suggests that perhaps graduate degrees have a more symbolic
value than an economic value in today’s Ukraine. Earning a Bachelor’s in a STEM discipline was enough for four of the five men to launch them into a career. Interestingly, two of the men, Nazar and Oleg (the youngest in the group), did not have any plans to have a career related to their respective majors, Logistics and Mechanical Engineering. Oleg even worked at a bridal shop, a female-dominated environment, through networking with a friend. Nazar, on the hand, seemed more interested in getting out of Ukraine any way he could and had a job lined up on a cruise ship.

Tokar asserts that with globalization and the concurrent growth of “world Englishes,” motives for learning the language within the Ideal L2 Self category “can be driven by a desire to develop an identity in which learners remain rooted in their local culture but take on a more global identity, independent of any wish to integrate into a native English-speaking community” (7). The way in which this community has grown allows for those learning the language to develop individually and create their own self-identity without pressure to adopt the norms and cultures of English speakers and English-speaking countries. For example, one interviewee, Tatiana, met a man from Serbia while on the Work and Travel program (a program that allows foreigners the opportunity to spend four months working low-wage jobs in restaurants, water parks, and other place of employment) in the United States, and they fell in love. The only way they could communicate was through English, and she gave her boyfriend credit for how much her English had improved. This is proof of the global English-speaking community that exists beyond the confines of native speakers.

---

26 World Englishes refers to the local variations of English around the globe.
Motivations for Learning English: Gendered Variation in the Development of the L2 Self

With increasing integration with Europe and English-speaking countries, proficiency in English has become a valuable skill for the labor market and beneficial for social, economic, and physical mobility in Ukraine and beyond. The primary motivation for learning English is economic opportunities, which all of the interviewees maintained in their answer on why most Ukrainians learn English. For the small group of Ukrainians I interviewed, however, motivations for learning English were diverse and often more nuanced than anticipated. Women especially gave more complex answers that tied back to their “ideal self” more so than the men’s answers, which primarily focused on work and making more money.

Among the interviewees there was a consensus that economic mobility was the primary reason for learning English because it helps to build economic capital for Ukrainians, where jobs are scarce and often pay low wages. 10 out of 12 interviewees stated that proficiency in English made them more successful without any caveats because it provides them with more cultural and economic capital. As Oksana stated, “It’s like you know something that somebody doesn’t know. It’s new skills. It is the possibility to communicate with foreigners.” In her explanation, unlike those by men, she discusses communication as success, not money or a promotion.

In answer to the question whether English proficiency had made them more successful, two interviewees, both women, explained that success, in general, does not require English proficiency, even though it may have made them personally more successful. Irina used her father as an example:

Success is a very personal, subjective notion. Because, for example, my father, I think he’s a successful person and he doesn’t speak any English. But you know, he had some goals, he achieved them, he succeeds in his work, in everything he does, so he’s a successful person. Yeah, I wouldn’t say it’s needed for success.
To Irina, success is not so black and white, which Svitlana echoed. English itself does not make one more successful unless it helps them with their career or life in some way. However, the fact that English is a specialized skill in high demand does increase a person’s chances for success.

While not all jobs in Ukraine require English, interviewees believed that soon without English it would be much more difficult to find a good paying job. Oleg predicted that in 10 years one could not find a job without proficiency in the language. Currently, English provides the necessary skills to connect to more lucrative international opportunities that are accessed either through the internet or by moving abroad. As Ukraine becomes more and more integrated into the global market, there will continue to be more pressure from employers to learn English. Denis understood that by learning English, in addition to his native Ukrainian and Russian, he becomes more valuable to employers who desire multilingual employees. For him, learning English paid off as it allowed him to pursue migration to Canada with his family. As more people learn English, the competition for these lucrative jobs will become more intense and the level of proficiency required will increase. Nazar stated, “Every company requires English in the highest position, so if you want to be a manager in Poland, in Ukraine, you have to know English at least B2 or C127 level if you really want to earn a lot and have a good position.” English thus provides the chance for economic mobility. While both men and women were quick to name work as the foremost reason for learning English in Ukraine, their individual answers suggest more variance and a gender divide in what their motivations are and how they express them.

Motivation driven by self-fulfillment and following their passion rather than money separates the men and women interviewed. This can be observed in Figure 6 (below), which

---
27 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) measures proficiency from A1 - C2. Those at an A1 and A2 level are considered “basic users,” B1 and B2 level are considered “independent users,” and C1 and C2 level are considered “proficient users.” CEFR was created as a way to standardize the different language exams used across the world to a single scale (“Common”).
emphasizes the differences in why adult men and women seek to improve their English beyond what they learned at school. The most notable difference is that work was the primary driver of all five men, but women were motivated to learn English for work-related reasons only after they realized they enjoyed learning the language. Even then, not all the women used English for their jobs but continued studying it anyway. Further, many of the interviewees mentioned the communicative potential of the language, but whether this communication was about working with clients or discovering new people and cultures varied across genders. Figure 6 and the responses mentioned above demonstrate the many different roles English plays in the construction of the L2 Ideal Self along gender lines. Men primarily mentioned the economic motivations for learning English, whereas the women expressed a deeper bond with the language itself and the culture accessible through it.

*Figure 6: Gendered Motives for Learning English*
For three of the interviewees, all women, the possibility to spend time in the United States as part of the Work and Travel Program was invaluable for personal and linguistic growth. These three interviewees acknowledged how lucky they were to get this rare opportunity to improve their English and to live abroad for several months. For Svitlana, obtaining the visa for her trip was a dream come true and proved to her friends and family that it was possible: “I always wanted to go exactly to the States. I kept saying, ‘Oh, I am going to go.’ And everybody kept saying to stop being so naïve until the last moment when I’m at the airport and I have my visa.” While in the US, Svitlana visited Florida, Wisconsin, Illinois, a Six Flags Park, and New York City. Even if it seemed like a daunting task, the women sought to immerse themselves in the language and culture of an English-speaking country. In discussing their exclusively positive experiences, they did not mention the actual work they were doing or how much money they earned, but rather the people they met, the places they explored, and the things they learned. To quote Svitlana again, “the States actually inspired me.”

Likewise, the language the women used to describe their experiences and objectives points in the direction of the Ideal L2 Self model: learning English “to meet new people,” “to find out how people live,” and “to broaden your horizons.” Others discussed specifically how studying a language is transformative because it “gives you some power” and “you feel like you have a different personality.” The women believe in and understand the cultural and symbolic capital of language learning. For them, English is not just a tool for economic mobility; it is a tool for understanding other points of view, meeting foreigners, engaging in other cultures, and understanding themselves better—all within the global English-speaking community.

---

28 Eligible applicants must be “sufficiently proficient in English,” “post-secondary school students enrolled in and actively pursuing a degree,” finished with at least one semester, and “pre-placed in a job prior to entry” (“Summer”).
While many women interviewed discussed language as something self-fulfilling, the men were much more reserved about their love of language learning. For instance, Irina eloquently described her love of languages, which as the director of the language school is not surprising:

When I was able to speak English, I really just liked it so much because when you speak another language it gives you some power. You feel like you are different personality you know...And then when I started studying Spanish, Spanish is easier for Ukrainians, I studied it for 1 year and I had B1 level. So, also, when you see the progress, the result, you know, it motivates you as well. Yes, and then Italian is similar to Spanish, so why not. And it never stops.

Similar to Anastasia and Svitlana, fellow teachers at the school, Irina was drawn to teaching foreign languages by her personal interest in them. In other words, the three teachers thought of English as a vital part of their identity. Their future jobs originated from their initial love of and curiosity about the English language; economic considerations were not the primary factor. This finding was consistent across the board for female interviewees. English skills were developed independently of their career aspirations. All the female interviewees explained language learning as a project ‘for the soul,” for self-fulfillment, and not just for a career or money.

In contrast, all five men talked about English proficiency as an opportunity to build economic capital. The only male interviewee to express any passion for language learning simply stated, “The more I learn, the higher is my motivation.” Compared to Irina’s description above, this expression of the same motivation and enthusiasm about languages lacks emotion and narration. Two men who were motivated to improve their English strictly by working with foreign clients from English-speaking countries were Yaroslav and Andrii. Their motivation for continuing to learn English after college was their need to speak with clients with a minimal number of mistakes to increase their professionalism, not any integrative or personal desires. While communication is their primary goal, it is a work-related, instrumental communication.

29 Their level of English was comparable, so this was not a factor in this divergence.
meant to advance their careers—in other world, a type of an Ought-to Self. Economic mobility and career aspirations drove them to attend the language school to improve his language skills.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, two female interviewees, Oksana and Sofia, were learning English purely for communication within the global community and self-satisfaction, as neither them used it at work: Oksana worked as a manager of water resources, and Sofia as a graphic designer. Unlike the other interviewees, communication with speakers of English was Sofia’s and Oksana’s only goal, which is rooted in self-fulfillment and a desire to meet people from different cultures. However, as her English improves, Oksana hopes to find a new job: “I want to find a new job that uses English because if I don’t use English, I will lose my skills and 4 years of learning English will be lost.” Whatever her future career, Oksana’s initial motivation to learn was founded in personal satisfaction rather than economic gain, and even the planned job change is about maintaining English rather than strictly about money.

The variance in motivations between men and women is partly driven by social norms that influence men to focus on being stable breadwinners for their families and women to focus on being more of a social being, which is exactly what Nazar, the only interviewee to make such a generalization, said. This generalization holds for male interviewees, at least in the way they presented themselves to an American interviewer. However, there was much more nuance to the motivations of the female interviewees than this simply dichotomy. At the heart of why the women were continuing to learn English was love of the language. The L2 Ideal Self was the driving force rather than the L2 Ought-to Self, which was behind the instrumental motivations of the men.
Conclusion

What started as a research project on gendered motives for learning English expanded as I began to understand how language is a part of one’s identity. My initial hypothesis for this study was that gendered motives for learning English would be present in the responses of my interviewees. This proved to be accurate, but I discovered greater complexity than just a simple dichotomy. First, beyond the explanation of why they chose to continue studying English, their interest in and fascination with the language varied by gender. Women were much more expressive about their love for the language than men and more aware of its symbolic role in social mobility and identity-building.

Second, while interviewees assured me that Ukraine did not have gender issues, such as gendered professions and a wage gap, it was evident in their answers that society had influenced their perception of language within a gendered framework. Thus, it is not just a differentiation in reasons for studying language that this thesis addresses, but also the ways in which the narrative is told and how interviewees understand gender within their society.

In Ukraine, the return to traditional gender norms in the post-Soviet era, accompanied by globalization, de-Russification, and Westward orientation, has created diverging motives for adult men and women to improve their English language skills. The interviewees’ responses revealed how Ukraine’s identity is in transition and how greater access to the global English-speaking community has influenced the direction and speed of this transition. While many see the English language and subsequent integration with the West as a positive change, gender norms are presumed by interviewees to be unrelated and unproblematic. This leads to a paradoxical dilemma for Ukraine as it seeks Euro-integration but has yet to adopt necessary reforms, including those regarding gender-related issues.
In thinking about the future of English and gender in Ukraine, women will likely be the catalyst for change because they are using the language to understand themselves and other cultures better. Future generations and the youth of today who will grow up in a completely different Ukraine than their parents and grandparents are also going to continue to increase pressure on more traditional norms. Media from the West and increasing access to the global English-speaking community through the Internet will continue to introduce young people to new ideas and perspectives of how to build their own identities and their nation’s identity. Precisely how these complex processes will affect Ukraine’s future remains to be seen.
Appendices

Appendix I: List of Interview Questions

1. Introduction – Tell me about yourself
   a. What is your name?
   b. How old are you?
   c. Where were you born?
   d. What is your level of education?
   e. What do you do for a living?
   f. Are you married?
      i. Yes: Does your spouse speak English?
      ii. No: Do you want to get married?
   g. Do you have kids?
      i. No: Do you want kids? Would you want your kids to learn English?
      ii. Yes: Are they learning English? Is this important to you? Why?

2. I want to better understand the Ukrainian way of life. Please describe your everyday life to me.
   a. Hobbies, shopping, work, free time

3. Is your experience as a woman or man reflected in the TV shows, movies, or advertisements you see?
   a. Do you see lives like yours portrayed?
   b. If yes, expand
   c. If no, what are the differences between your life and theirs?

4. How long have you been learning English?
   a. How would you describe your level of proficiency?
      i. High, medium, or low

5. When you first decided to start learning English what did you hope to accomplish? Has that motivation changed over time?
   a. What do you hope to accomplish in the future by learning English?
      i. Better or high paying job?
      ii. Leaving Ukraine or this part of Ukraine for a city? Migration?
      iii. Marriage to a foreigner?
      iv. Education in a foreign country?
      v. Cultural understanding?
      vi. Travel?
   b. Do you find English to be important? Why?
   c. Do you think that knowing English makes you more successful?

6. Are your motivations the same as those in your class?
   a. Do men or women have the same motivation?
   b. Why do you think these motivations are different (or similar)?
Appendix II: Table of TV Shows and Movies per Genre and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td><em>House of Cards</em></td>
<td><em>Devious Maids, Elementary, Handmaid’s Tale, Narcos, Scandal, This is Us, The Notebook, Dynasty, Lie to Me</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td><em>Friends</em></td>
<td><em>Friends, iCarly, Victorious, Shameless</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic Comedy</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sex and the City, Bridget Jones, High School Musical, PS I Love You, She’s the Man</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td><em>A Kingdom of Heaven, Apocalypse Now, Dunkirk, Saving Private Ryan, Vikings</em></td>
<td><em>The Crown, The Kennedys</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy/Sci Fi</td>
<td><em>Game of Thrones, Supernatural, Thor, Welcome to Zombieland, Interstellar</em></td>
<td><em>Black Mirror, Game of Thrones, Stranger Things, Vampire Diaries, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Secret Circle</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work Cited


