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N. Kolisnichenko

## THE SECURITIZATION OF LANGUAGE IN THE USA NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

*The phenomenon of the securitization of language in United States of America national security policy is examined. It is researched how language policy becomes an element of national security discourse when it is perceived as a potential threat to sovereignty, cultural identity, and social stability. Special emphasis is focused on the historical aspect of the development of USA language policy, beginning with the adoption of the National Defense Education Act (1958), which introduced language education as a tool for ensuring national security.*

*The stages of language securitization are analyzed, particularly its intensification following the events of September 11, 2001. It is shown that language became a key element in military response strategies, notably through the creation of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (2006).*

*Two main approaches to language securitization are highlighted: the first interprets language as a means of enhancing intercultural understanding; the second views language education as a military tool for securing strategic advantage. The impact of language policy on the rights of linguistic minorities is analyzed, along with the role of the state in their protection.*

*The importance of a critical approach to language policy in the context of national security is emphasized, as it can both promote social cohesion and provoke additional conflicts.*

*It is concluded that the securitization of language is a complex process that requires balancing security needs with the protection of human rights.*

**Keywords:** securitization, language policy, national security, USA, language education, political security, cultural identity, human rights, linguistic minorities, social stability, military strategy.

**Statement of the problem.** The issue of language is of exceptional significance and relevance in Ukraine, taking its historical, cultural, socio-political, and security dimensions. The Ukrainian language serves as the foundation of national identity and is one of the key symbols of Ukrainian statehood and culture. For centuries, Ukraine has endured policies of russification, which during the soviet era led to the marginalization of the Ukrainian language in public and official spheres. Today, its revival requires persistent and sustained effort.

Since the onset of the full-scale russian invasion in 2022, the language issue has been actively exploited by russia to justify its aggression, under the pretense of "protecting russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine". This has further underscored the urgency of protecting the Ukrainian language as the state language and expanding its use in various spheres – education, media, public administration – in order to strengthen Ukraine's informational space and counteract russian propaganda.

Beyond its role as a means of communication, the Ukrainian language today also functions as a vital political, cultural, and security instrument. The protection and development of the Ukrainian language is not only a matter of restoring historical justice but also a prerequisite for the successful future of Ukraine as an independent and democratic state.

In this regard, it is useful and worthwhile to examine the experience of the United States in the securitization of language. While in this multicultural and multilingual country, the intersection of language and security has never reached the level of intensity currently observed in Ukraine, certain legislative acts adopted in specific historical contexts can be interpreted as examples of language securitization, as a balancing act between the need to protect national security and the principles of a democratic society.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The issue of language security has been actively explored by international scholars. Language, its symbolic significance and modes of use, has been a central focus in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and other researchers. The role of language in moments of heightened national consciousness or international tension has been examined by R. Brecht, J. Lo Bianco, W. Rivers, among others. The intersection of immigration and the securitization of language has been studied by scholars such as S. Baele, A. McKenzie, and O. Sterck.

The securitization of language emerged as a distinct area of scholarly interest in Western academic discourse particularly during the Cold War era, amid tensions with the communist bloc. Various theoretical interpretations of securitization have been developed, notably by T. Balzacq. The role of language in national security contexts has been analyzed by prominent scholars including B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, A. Liddicoat, and M. Pratt. The specificities of foreign language learning in relation to state security have been considered by M. Williams, C. Kramsch, and others.

Among Ukrainian researchers, issues concerning the role and significance of language in national security have been addressed by L. Kravchenko, Yu. Makarets, and M. Moser.

The securitization of language and its practical implications present unique challenges and opportunities. Addressing these issues requires a deep understanding of best international practices in the context of confronting threats and defending national interests.

**The purpose of the article.** This article aims to reveal the relevance of applying various approaches to the securitization of language in the national security policy of the United States of America and to outline potential perspectives for Ukraine in this regard.

**Summary of the main material.** Security is predominantly associated with the concept of national survival. Language policy acquires a security dimension when language is perceived as a threat to national sovereignty or to the survival of the state itself. Several key issues related to language as an element of state security are outlined by L. Kravchenko [2].

1. Language functions as a form of soft power, and therefore serves as a means of manipulating both individuals and mass audiences.

2. Language can become a powerful weapon in hybrid warfare, in which conflicts unfold across four domains: the physical, informational, social, and cognitive spheres [1].

3. Language influences the formation of identity.

4. Language plays a role in shaping worldview.

The process by which a particular issue, phenomenon, or domain of activity is constructed and perceived as a security threat, thereby justifying the implementation of urgent and extraordinary measures to prevent it, is referred to as securitization. This process involves the framing of a phenomenon, situation, or group as a danger to the well-being of the state. Consequently, concepts of security and insecurity are not objective conditions of threat or protection, but rather interpretive frameworks through which phenomena are understood and perceived [8]. Thus, securitization both designates something as a threat and legitimizes specific forms of response to that threat.

Language securitization refers to the process in which language issues or language policy are framed as threats to national security, cultural identity, social stability, or sovereignty. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in multiethnic states where language is a core element of national identity, or in conflict contexts where language becomes a tool of political fighting.

When language is associated with a perceived threat, it becomes part of the securitization process and, at the level of public policy, is relocated into the sphere of security. In this context, language is no longer viewed merely as a means of communication but is instead linked to either the implementation of threats or to measures designed to respond to or mitigate such threats. The most conventional understanding of threat pertains to military security are threats to territorial integrity, the possibility of war, or other forms of violent conflict [12]. Hence, language becomes a means by which threats are either produced or prevented [16].

Language-related issues may also fall within the domain of political security, especially when they involve challenges to the authority of the government or to its policy direction.

Language operates within the framework of societal security, where threats are perceived as risks to the identity of certain population groups due to cultural, migratory, or other social phenomena and processes. In the realm of political security, threats may arise from ethnic groups within a state, particularly linguistic minorities, who challenge the authority of the government and its institutional mechanisms. As M. Moser notes, the state is only responsible for guaranteeing the free development, use, and protection of minority languages from suppression or prohibition but is not obligated to undertake extensive support measures [4].

Societal security may also be challenged by the presence of immigrant communities within the national space [7]. According to Yu. Makarets, linguistic conflicts are often symptoms of deeper social fractures. Their effective resolution is essential for maintaining national unity, countering separatist tendencies, and, ultimately, ensuring national security [3].

In the context of U.S. language education policy, linguistic threats have historically been framed as external rather than internal to the state. The first significant attempt at language education securitization was the adoption of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 by the U.S. Congress [21]. This legislation emphasized the necessity of advancing knowledge as a means of safeguarding national security [20]. However, it did not fully securitize language education, as it recognized additional functions of language learning beyond security concerns. While language education was integrated into the security domain, it did not become exclusively subordinated to it.

The NDEA described the contemporary situation as an "educational emergency", equating deficiencies in education, particularly in foreign language acquisition, to a national security threat. In doing so, the legislation positioned language education as part of broader national efforts to respond to security challenges.

Emerging during the Cold War, the NDEA was designed as a strategic response to military threats posed to the United States by communist states, particularly the soviet union, in the fields of technology and scientific advancement following the launch of sputnik [11]. The act prioritized language education at the post-secondary level, including the teaching of less commonly taught languages, the training of foreign language instructors, and the development of educational materials and assessments.

As part of this initiative, language and regional studies centers were established to expand knowledge of various parts of the world. While the legislation did not specify which languages should be taught in these centers, it set criteria that prioritized the study of underrepresented foreign languages in the United States. The stated purpose of such language training was articulated as follows: "Individuals trained in these languages are needed by the Federal Government, business, industry, and education in the United States" [20]. This framing positioned language education not solely within the domain of military security but also within economic and educational contexts.

According to the provisions of the Act, education, integrated into the discourse of national security, became a tool for promoting the acquisition of languages deemed essential to the country's security. The involvement of business and industry in this process, thus expanding the scope of securitization, reflected a reality in which language education was recognized as operating within a broader security context. The Act explicitly linked national defense and education to production, stating: "the defense of the nation depends upon mastery of modern techniques developed through complex scientific processes, the discovery and development of new technologies, and the advancement of new knowledge" [20].

The securitization of language was not aimed at direct military responses to threats, but rather at enhancing national capacity to mitigate or prevent such threats from arising. The focus was on establishing language institutes dedicated to the broader study of languages in society, aimed at "intensive training, particularly in the use of new teaching methods and the development of instructional materials for individuals who are teaching or preparing to teach any modern foreign language in elementary or secondary schools" [20].

The NDEA broadened the objectives of language education within a security framework. It also reflected a security paradigm in which language learning was seen as a means of reducing security risks. Language training was intended to improve understanding of other world cultures and to promote "instruction in modern foreign languages and other areas needed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the regions, areas, or countries in which these languages are commonly used" [20].

Thus, the aim of language education was defined not solely as strategic communication for preserving national sovereignty or ensuring societal stability, but as the broader acquisition of foreign languages. This approach reflected the securitization discourse of language, which emphasized the necessity of understanding speakers of other languages, positioning linguistic competence as critical to such understanding.

The events of September 11, 2001, marked a turning point in the securitization of language in the United States, prompting a reconfiguration of language as a key element in military responses to conflict. This shift complemented the earlier NDEA discourse, which emphasized foreign language acquisition for cultural understanding, by introducing a more explicitly military focus. The Homeland Security Education Act (HSEA) [14], proposed in 2001 though never enacted, framed language learning as a means of threat prevention through the deeper integration of language into military interaction processes.

The Act began by asserting that foreign language knowledge was critical to both the economic competitiveness and national security of the United States, while also emphasizing the need to improve the quality of foreign language instruction in primary and secondary education [5].

This rationale for foreign language education echoed the goals of the NDEA, while incorporating both military and economic dimensions. However, the HSEA went further by explicitly associating low levels of language proficiency with national security risks. Language competence was clearly defined as a capability required by all Americans, with the claim that "everyone must develop a global perspective. To understand the world around us, we must know the language, culture, and history of other nations" [5].

By reaffirming the goals outlined in the NDEA during the 1950s, the HSEA rearticulated the security dimensions of language education, placing greater emphasis on the military relevance of linguistic skills, "the ability to communicate in languages other than English, and to understand and respect cultural and social differences, is essential to the success of military operations in both peace and wartime" [5].

Thus, within the framework of the Homeland Security Education Act (HSEA), the emphasis on language education and security shifted from a general U.S. need for linguistic and cultural understanding, aimed at better knowing and comprehending other nations, to the operational use of foreign languages in military contexts. Proficiency in a foreign language was no longer associated solely with language competence and cultural awareness, but became linked to specific military dimensions of national security [16]. Language was clearly securitized as a component of military response to threats.

The transition of language into the domain of military security highlighted new qualification levels that had not been addressed under the NDEA. This concerned the advancement of competencies required for fulfilling national security functions. As stated in the Act: "what was once considered an adequate level of proficiency is no longer sufficient. The ability to understand and convey technical and complex information has become critically important" [5].

The focus thus increasingly turned toward activities related to warfare, rather than to peacebuilding. The Act emphasized language-based activities such as post-mission debriefings and interrogations of suspects. Attention was directed toward learning the languages of the so-called "axis of evil": Arabic, Korean, Persian/Farsi, and Pashto. Teaching and learning these languages was framed as preparation for engaging with the languages of potential adversaries. According to C. Kramsch, the priority was not to raise the general level of foreign language proficiency among the population or to foster international educational integration for better communication with allies, but to form a select group of individuals capable of using foreign languages for intelligence-gathering purposes [15].

Although the HSEA was never enacted, the discourse of securitization permeated other elements of U.S. language policy. For example, the establishment of the Center for the Advanced Study of Language (CASL) at the University of Maryland, a research center affiliated with the Department of Defense, was justified by the need to enhance U.S. intelligence capabilities, safeguard national security, and serve U.S. foreign policy objectives abroad [9]. Intelligence became a specialized domain of linguistic competence, necessitating the study of adversarial activity as a method of anticipating and responding to future military threats.

The emphasis on intelligence within the sphere of language education underscored the need for high-level linguistic proficiency in languages vital for intelligence gathering, as well as competencies beyond traditional language instruction – such as the development of technologies for monitoring, extracting, and translating information for intelligence purposes.

Some of the ideas proposed in the HSEA resurfaced in the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), launched by President George W. Bush in 2006. The term "critical language speakers" emerged to describe individuals proficient in languages considered strategically important to the national security, foreign policy, economy, and international relations of the United States. The NSLI focused on addressing the country's "critical language needs" in relation to security, outlining three main goals of language education.

1. Expanding the pool of critical language speakers while encouraging earlier initiation of language learning.

2. Increasing the number of individuals who possess high-level fluency in these languages.

3. Enhancing the supply of foreign language instructors and resources to support their training.

The need to increase the number of foreign language teachers and ensure their proper training led to the establishment of the Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps (CLRC), which aimed to create a pool of specialists with specific language competencies to support military and national needs. In 2013, the CLRC was rebranded as the National Language Service Corps, though it did not evolve into a military reserve force, functioning instead as a civilian program under the National Security Education Program (2004) [22]. However, despite its civilian



status, the program was administered by the U.S. Department of Defense and authorized under the National Defense Authorization Act (2013) [19]. While the program's stated goals were to provide advisory and linguistic services to the government, its administration by the Department of Defense underscores the primacy of security functions in its mandate.

The U.S. Department of Defense further developed the language-security nexus through its publication of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (2006) [13]. This document formalized the role of language as an integral component of military operations, linking linguistic capabilities directly to the ability to wage war "the new approach to warfare in the 21st century will require individuals who possess foreign language skills beyond the current level of existing specialists" [13].

The Roadmap also acknowledged the lack of sufficient language competencies, thereby reinforcing the securitization of language and emphasizing how inadequate language skills hinder threat response. This deficiency was attributed to the historical undervaluation of language in military operations, as "language skills were not considered combat skills and were not sufficiently incorporated into operational or contingency planning". The document recognized insufficient efforts to prepare appropriate specialists and a general underestimation of the linguistic potential within the military, among active duty personnel, reservists, and civilians alike. Language skills were not considered core competencies within the defense system, even though they are as crucial as critical weapons systems [13].

Today, the role and place of language in security discourse are increasingly emphasized. A shift is occurring in how language is understood within security-related contexts and political documents. For instance, in the NDEA, linguistic competence was not presented as exclusively military in nature. Rather, it emphasized the necessity of understanding speakers of other languages and being understood in turn. Language was primarily regarded as contextually important to creating the conditions necessary for security, rather than as a direct response to military threats. Earlier approaches featured a looser link between language and security, treating language competence as an indirect contribution to mitigating threats, except in the specific context of intelligence gathering. In contrast, the Roadmap treats this contribution as direct.

The Roadmap proposes several solutions to the problem of linguistic deficiency, specifically related to educational practices and language policy. It calls for changes in recruitment practices, particularly targeting American citizens who are native speakers of languages other than English, referred to as "heritage language speakers". These individuals typically grow up in households or communities where a language other than the dominant national language is spoken. While they generally possess good oral comprehension and speaking ability, their literacy skills, especially reading and writing, tend to be underdeveloped compared to speakers who have received formal education in that language.

The focus on the military role of "heritage language speakers" marks a departure from earlier policy, which assumed that language education was primarily aimed at developing the linguistic competencies of English-speaking Americans, with little attention paid to the potential of heritage speakers. However, even in the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, the involvement of heritage speakers in military tasks receives limited attention beyond roles such as translation and interpretation. This ambiguity reflects a broader issue inherent in the securitization of language.

According to M. Pratt [23] and J. Lo Bianco [17], the development of high-level linguistic competence requires more than mere fluency, it necessitates fostering empathy and understanding toward other cultures and individuals, building relationships with speakers of other languages, and integrating into multilingual communities. For heritage speakers, the connection to language and culture is even more deeply personal, as it pertains to their identity as members of specific cultural groups [18]. However, when language becomes associated with security, such identification can become problematic. Under the logic of securitization, these cultural ties may be perceived as aligning with the "enemy", thereby positioning heritage language speakers as potential threats themselves.

Language policy as a tool of securitization can take many forms. In the context of language education, two principal strategies emerge, they are polar approaches to the relationship between language and security. In one approach, language itself is framed as a threat, one that national security policy seeks to neutralize. This was the case in Turkey, for example, where the Kurdish language and identity were considered components of a threat to national territorial integrity. In such discourses, the securitization of language is framed as benefiting the adversary. Repressive language policy attempts to remove «hostile» languages from public domains, particularly education, where, according to P. Bourdieu, they might otherwise gain symbolic value and wider public legitimacy [9]. The goal of such policy is to destroy the symbolic capital that these languages may possess.

An alternative approach to linking language and security through language policy posits that security involves not only knowing and understanding nations or groups perceived as threats, but also influencing how these groups are linguistically represented. Language education is thus seen as a means of deepening such understanding and knowledge. It aims to broaden access to language learning across all educational levels as a way to address the national deficit in linguistic capabilities. This is essentially the manner in which language has been securitized in the United States. However, the phrase "knowing and understanding others" can be interpreted and operationalized in different ways.

The first approach views the state's response to threats as one of mitigating risks and challenges by fostering better relationships among language groups. It focuses on general relationships between peoples and nations, under the assumption that national security threats arise from a lack of understanding. Therefore, building mutual understanding is framed as a general solution to security concerns. This was the dominant direction of U.S. securitization discourse beginning in the 1950s.

The second approach emphasizes the specific actions of enemies who pose direct threats to national security. In this model, the state deploys linguistic capabilities to identify and respond to military threats. Here, language is used strategically to gain an advantage over particular groups, requiring in-depth knowledge of the behavior and communication patterns of speakers of other languages. After the events of September 11, 2001, U.S. language education policy increasingly shifted toward this interpretation of language's role in national security.

In both cases, the central issue concerns language policy in education. The aforementioned approaches conceptualize language as a foundation for effective national security, yet they construct the problem (and its resolution) in different ways. They demonstrate that language becomes a problem only when it is deliberately framed as such, and that its connection to security emerges through discursive processes.

These discursive processes represent forms of securitization as mechanisms by which a particular phenomenon is shifted into the domain of security.

### **Conclusions**

The securitization of language in the United States has been driven by the need to reinforce national unity and integrate immigrants. Policymakers have expressed concern over multilingualism as a potential barrier to social cohesion, leading to the official promotion of English. Another driving force behind language securitization was the escalation of the Cold War and the associated ideological threat, particularly within the context of U.S. anti-communist policy, where Russian and other languages of communist states became politically sensitive in specific situations.

Today, language is increasingly framed as a tool in the fight against terrorism, which explains the heightened interest in learning languages spoken by populations perceived as potential security threats. Certain historical and security-related contexts have compelled the state to prioritize language policy. The securitization of language in U.S. national security policy serves to protect unity and national cohesion, counter propaganda and separatism, promote immigrant integration, and confront threats, especially when particular languages are associated with adversaries, leading to their securitization.

A future direction for research involves examining the role of language policy in combating terrorism and extremism, particularly through the justification of policy mechanisms aimed at addressing terrorist or extremist groups in which language functions as a key marker of identity. The development of new theoretical approaches to the securitization of language, those that integrate sociological, linguistic, and political perspectives, could expand the study of how language practices become embedded within broader national security strategies.

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Н. М. Колісніченко

### **СЕК'ЮРИТИЗАЦІЯ МОВИ У ПОЛІТИЦІ З ПИТАНЬ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ БЕЗПЕКИ США**

*Досліджено феномен сек'юритизації мови у політиці з питань національної безпеки США. Зазначено, як саме мовна політика стає елементом дискурсу національної безпеки, коли розглядається потенційною загрозою суверенітету, культурній ідентичності та соціальній стабільності. Особливий акцент зроблено на історичному аспекті розвитку мовної політики США – із прийняттям Закону «Про національну оборону та освіту» (1958 р.), що запровадив мовну освіту як інструмент забезпечення державної безпеки.*

*Проаналізовано етапи сек'юритизації мови, зокрема її посилення після подій 11 вересня 2001 р. Показано, що мова стала ключовим елементом у стратегіях військового реагування, зокрема через створення програми «Дорожня карта трансформації мов оборони» (2006 р.).*

*Висвітлено два основних підходи до сек'юритизації мови: перший – мова використовується для посилення міжнаціонального порозуміння; другий – мовна освіта стає інструментом у військових цілях для забезпечення стратегічної переваги. Проаналізовано, яким чином мовна політика впливає на права мовних меншин, а також розглянуто роль держави у їхньому захисті.*

*Визначено важливість критичного підходу до мовної політики в контексті національної безпеки, оскільки вона може як сприяти соціальній згуртованості, так і спричиняти додаткові конфлікти.*

*Зроблено висновок про те, що сек'юритизація мови є складним процесом, який потребує балансування між безпековими потребами і дотриманням прав людини.*

**Ключові слова:** *сек'юритизація, мовна політика, національна безпека, США, мовна освіта, політична безпека, культурна ідентичність, права людини, мовні меншини, соціальна стабільність, військова стратегія.*

**KOLISNICHENKO Natalia** – Doctor of Science in Public Administration, Professor, Head of the Department of Social and Human Sciences, Institute of Public Service and Management of the Odesa Polytechnic National University

[https:// orcid.org/0000-0003-1083-7990](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1083-7990)