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ENGLISH IN A UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITY: A LINGUA FRANCA, NOT A LINGUA FRANKENSTEIN

Based on previous research, the role of English in Europe can be summarized into three themes: 1) English is seen as necessary in modern society and therefore is a threat to multilingualism; 2) English is at the top of a hierarchy of languages; 3) English is the lingua franca, but people can still be multilingual. The increasing value of English in society – and the related concerns about the threat English poses to other languages – has been connected with the increasing use of English as a medium of instruction in European higher education institutions. While Ukraine has not seen such an increase in English-medium higher education programs, it is likely to do so in the future as it follows European trends or strives for European integration. This article presents research on the extent to which English may be a threat to the Ukrainian or Russian languages in Ukraine. The author spent nine months at a Ukrainian institution of higher education which was using English as a medium of instruction. She observed classes taught in English, and conducted interviews with students and teachers from those classes (n=30). Students and teachers emphasized that English operates as a foreign language in Ukraine, and therefore is not a threat to native languages. While English is seen as necessary for communication with individuals from other countries (i.e. as a lingua franca), it is one of multiple languages that is seen as important for students' future. In fact, students of the first year were already planning to learn additional foreign languages such as Chinese, and students of the third year were demonstrating knowledge of second foreign languages including German, French, and Spanish. These findings suggest students at a Ukrainian university are focused on both English as a lingua franca and on multilingual development.