

Michał Głuszkowski
Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruń
(Univerza Nikolaja Kopernika v Toruňu)
micglu@umk.pl

Slavistična revija 72/3 (2024): 307–320
UDK 811.161.1:378.4(438)
DOI 10.57589/srl.v72i3.4193
Tip 1.04

Grzegorz Koneczniak
Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruń
(Univerza Nikolaja Kopernika v Toruňu)
gregorex@umk.pl

Dorota Paško-Koneczniak
Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruń
(Univerza Nikolaja Kopernika v Toruňu)
dorpas@umk.pl

Contemporary Challenges of Teaching Russian at Universities in Poland

The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to major changes in the Slavic academic world, both in terms of international scientific cooperation and in teaching. This article is a survey-based analysis of the curricular changes within Russian-studies courses offered by Polish universities following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It will examine how teaching-process coordinators have managed to introduce necessary changes to ensure the continuity of Russian philology as a major, both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, what amendments are still expected, and what direction of Russian studies can be anticipated in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: Slavistics, Russian philology, war in Ukraine, curriculum, tertiary education

Sodobni izzivi pouka ruščine na univerzah na Poljskem

Ruska invazija na Ukrajino je povzročila velike spremembe v slovanskem akademskem svetu, tako v smislu mednarodnega znanstvenega sodelovanja kot tudi poučevanja. Ta članek je analiza sprememb programov rusistike na poljskih univerzah po ruski invaziji na Ukrajino 24. februarja 2022. Cilj analize je preučiti, kako je ljudem, odgovornim za koordinacijo učnega procesa, uspelo uvesti potrebne spremembe za zagotovitev kontinuitete rusistike kot smeri diplomskega in podiplomskega študija in kakšne spremembe je pričakovati v bližnji prihodnosti.

Ključne besede: slavistika, rusistika, vojna v Ukrajini, učni načrt, visokošolsko izobraževanje

1 Introduction

Among the Slavic languages, Russian has the largest number of users and is taught both in the Slavic area—e.g., Slovakia (Коренъкова et al. 2019) and Slovenia (Frank 2015)—and in other regions of the world—e.g., Ireland (Koneczniak, Paško-Koneczniak 2022) and Germany (Bergmann 2015). The Russian invasion in Ukraine caused discussions and changes regarding the place of the Russian language at world universities, which Timothy Reagan (2023) has illustrated by means of showing the

contrast between “Pushkin’s language” and “Putin’s language.” This broad international context manifests itself in various areas of Slavic studies in the form of specific problems requiring appropriate solutions that may also prove useful in other situations. They will be discussed on the example of tertiary education in Poland, a country which, since the beginning, has been affected by the war between its neighbours by the arrival of the largest number of refugees in the region, as well as an influx of economic immigrants from Ukraine (Chmielewska-Kalińska et al. 2023: 6–10). At the same time, Poland has a widely developed network of educational institutions teaching Russian (Karolczuk 2016) and multidimensional economic and tourist cooperation with Russia—that is, until 2022 (cf. e.g., Kamińska, Mularczyk 2019; Machowicz 2021).

The aim of this article is to assess the changes, already introduced and still planned, within undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of Russian studies offered at major Polish universities following Russia’s aggressive move against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In the university context, Russian courses are suffering the repercussions of the warfare. These may further affect recruitment and the already diminishing interest in such programmes in the long run. In the short run, to ensure educational continuity in the field of Russian studies, changes to university curricula and individual courses may already be occurring. The data presented, categorised, discussed and evaluated in this article will serve both descriptive and prescriptive purposes: to discuss the present-day condition of Russian studies in Poland, to make predictions about the future on the basis of the data collected, and to offer solutions to adapt the field of Russian studies to the current situation. The solutions suggested might become applicable worldwide.

The theoretical approach hinges upon the relationship between the study programme and the social, cultural and political changes on both the level of the target language and its environment and the relationships between the environment of the students with those of the two sides of the conflict, both standing as the neighbouring states in relation to Poland. In other words, as Smitina (2010) has noted, such impacts may involve post-baccalaureate experiences, such as student expectations of potential employment, attractiveness of courses and relevance to job market requirements—all in the context of the changed socio-political situation after February 2022. Such elements are part and parcel of the study programme and are specified in such elements of study programmes as a graduate’s profile or relevance to the mission and strategy of a given university.

What is currently observable at the level of tertiary education is a segment of the image of Russian-language teaching in Poland at lower educational levels. Joanna Ćwiek-Świdecka (2024) reports on the Ministry of Education and Science data that shows an alarming decline in the number of schools offering lessons within the standard curricula at the primary- and secondary levels. There are fewer schools that organise Russian lessons as a second foreign language course, 970 out of 14,000 primary schools and 1,133 out of 6,800 secondary schools (2023/2024) when compared to 1136 primary schools and 1,333 secondary schools (2022/2023) (Ćwiek-Świdecka 2024). The declining interest in Russian as a second language began immediately after the political transformation at the end of the 1980s and in early 1990s, when the lingua franca of the eastern side of the

Iron Curtain began to be replaced by English. Therefore, the demand in Polish schools for teachers of the Russian language, associated with the communist period, gradually decreased (Karolczuk 2016: 115–8). What is worth noting is that Ukrainians arriving in Poland are frequently fluent speakers of Russian, which makes them more competitive than Poles on the job market in the sectors requiring knowledge of Russian and, at the same time, causes the attractiveness of Russian-studies programmes to decrease even further (cf. Karolczuk 2016: 163–4; Ćwiek-Świderka 2024). As there has been a massive influx of Ukrainians to Poland following the Russian invasion, and most of them are fluent Russian speakers, this is going to affect the profile of Russian courses and interest in them across various educational levels and forms. The same statement is valid for Belarusians, whose emigration to Poland is less intense than that of Ukrainians but whose level of Russian is that of native speakers (cf. Chmiel et al. 2021: 38). It is thus obvious that if such a tendency is already developing in lower educational levels and at universities alike, higher-education institutions will face the cumulative impacts and academic centres with Russian-philology programmes will soon have to face this problem and develop ways of dealing with it, which some of them having already done so.

2 Detailed objectives of the study

Individual operational, both qualitative and quantitative, aims of the study include the following aspects:

- To analyse the current problems encountered during teaching processes in accordance with the requirements of the study programmes in operation;
- To analyse changes introduced into descriptions of courses already taught in academic year 2022/2023 with attention to the cultural, literary and linguistic (language-related) specificity of a given course;
- To analyse programme changes planned for the future and included in new study programmes for the academic year 2023/2024;
- To analyse student attendance in courses after 2022;
- To analyse recruitment data for admissions 2022/2023;
- To examine other changes occurring with respect to the future of Russian studies and Russian-studies programmes;
- To make predictions and offer productive solutions to the negative changes impacting Russian-studies programmes.

These operational aims will be used to develop substantive objectives of describing and presenting the current situation of Russian-studies, to single out the main trends and tendencies and to synthesise possible solutions for the development and sustenance of Russian-studies in Poland and abroad.

3 Research methods

Research methods and techniques have involved a survey and analysis of the Russian-studies programmes at the major universities in Poland. The survey contained

open questions addressing two levels of the organisation of the teaching process at the tertiary level: the internal sphere of changes within individual courses and the external sphere of changes within entire undergraduate and postgraduate Russian-philology programmes. Each takes into account the specificity of undergraduate and postgraduate studies, treating them separately.

On the basis of the data compiled from the descriptions of higher educational opportunities available in databases prepared by the Polish Ministry of Education and Science and private agencies (Edukacja 2023; Uczelnie 2023), we contacted the heads of university units (institutes and departments) offering Russian-philology studies, asking them to provide answers to the questionnaire themselves or to entrust this task to people responsible for managing and supervising the teaching process and determining the content of their curriculum. The e-mail sent to 18 universities¹ in April 2023 contained an invitation to participate in the study and an explanation of its goals, along with a link to the online survey questionnaire consisting of 13 closed (yes/no answers) and 13 open questions (in the case of positive answers) about specific problems encountered within the organisation and management of Russian studies after the 24 February 2022 invasion.

We also contacted representatives of the teaching staff at Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin, and Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, where Russian-philology studies has had a long tradition; but, due to the ongoing decrease in interest over year, recruitment for Russian-philology programmes has not been carried out for several years, and the Russian language appears in other majors, mainly in combined philological courses (e.g., English with Russian) or applied linguistics. The survey was ultimately completed by 25 respondents, because at some universities more than one person was responsible for particular issues related to determining the curricular content, the arrangement of courses and their content, which was appropriately noted in the comments in open questions and most often also explained in an e-mail from a person supervising the entire educational process. The correspondence also turned out to be a valuable source of information about the situation of teaching Russian philology and its components in Poland, because some units have made significant changes in this area in recent years, already before 2022, including the replacement of Russian philology with various programmes combining the Russian language with other Slavic and non-Slavic languages in the form of dual-language philology or applied linguistics, or establishing new specialisations that have modified the teaching of language and literature by incorporating elements of economics and management, or focusing on educating more versatile teachers.

¹ Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Casimir the Great University in Bydgoszcz, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Opole University, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Pomeranian University in Słupsk, University of Białystok, University of Gdańsk, University of Łódź, University of Rzeszów, University of Silesia in Katowice, University of Szczecin, University of Warmia and Mazury, University of Warsaw, University of Wrocław, University of Zielona Góra.

In the composition of questions we considered the categorisation and division of disciplines and fields of knowledge in accordance with which the learning outcomes are organised at the level of tertiary education in Poland. The assumption is that Russian philology-programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels correspond with language, literature and culture studies within the humanities and with the addition of extra-core social science elements as fulfilling the requirements for constructing study programmes at Polish universities and other academic units subject to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.²

Changes will be sought in the following elements of the construction of study programmes: description of learning outcomes at the level of the curriculum (knowledge, skills and competences), inclusion of extra qualifications within the programme (FLT component); candidate profile and overall description of the programme; removal and addition of courses, changes of course names, attribution of ECTS and number of teaching hours.

4 The Context

Changes regarding the teaching of Russian language and literature and other aspects of Russian philology are symptomatic of other changes in higher education in Poland that have been ongoing practically since the beginning of the last three decades and have depended on socio-political changes and demographic trends. The political transformation that began in 1989 and included a transition from a planned to free-market economy and the initiation of integration processes with Western Europe had a significant impact on all spheres of social life, and higher education is no exception. The most important changes included the emergence of public universities of various types, as well as private teaching institutions, only a few of which were among the leaders in terms of the quality of education, but their ever-growing number resulted in the massification of higher education in society (Rozmus, Sek 2015).

The second important change was the initiation of the process of adapting the educational system in Poland to the policies in other European countries, including, with a view to facilitating mobility, a milestone which was the signing of the Bologna Declaration, together with 28 other countries, in 1999 (Antonowicz 2015). This resulted in a shift from the uniform system of five-year-long (or six-year-long in some fields) Master's studies to the two-cycle tertiary education split into undergraduate and postgraduate (BA and MA) programmes. Unfavourable demographic trends related to the population decline and gentrification in Poland are combined with a change in the approach to university studies and the trend to complete higher education only at the first-cycle level, initiated by the implementation of the Bologna Process (UStat³ 2013; GUS⁴ 2022; GUS 2023; Potyra et al. 2023: 31–2). Therefore, universities have been trying to promote undergraduate student completion of bachelor's studies for their Master's

² Until November 2023 functioning as the Ministry of Education and Science.

³ Statistical Office in Warsaw.

⁴ Central Statistical Office.

courses, which involves, among other things, the establishment of new attractive and tailored curricula and the introduction of changes to existing programmes to meet the needs of both the labour market and individual university graduates (Antonowicz et al. 2020; Wasielewski, Antonowicz 2021). In general, prior to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, Russian studies were most often implemented in the form of Russian philology—i.e., major courses in Russian language and literature, although not considered among the most popular student choices, had a relatively stable position in Poland. Some universities offering those courses had problems with decreasing enrollments and attempted to reform and enhance their study programmes before the Russian invasion of Ukraine began; but these were difficulties driven by negative demographic trends and also known to other humanities majors (cf. Bojko 2019: 309–18; MEiN⁵ 2023). Thus, in the case described above, one can point to little or no bearing of the war in Ukraine on the diminishing interest in pursuing postgraduate Russian-philology studies.

What happened on 24 February 2022 was a shock to those in Russian-philology courses and tutorials. Students and academic staff had just begun a new semester, when their motivation, selection of teaching content and approaches to both teaching and learning within Russian studies were suddenly shattered. It involved various kinds of dilemma: How to teach contemporary Russia and its culture? How to continue teaching Ukrainian students pursuing Russian-studies programmes in Poland? How to continue including authentic materials and multimedia resources as teaching aids in Russian courses? These were some of the questions posed by university teachers. More distant ones concerned the future of Russian studies in Poland and the possibility and prospects of finding employment after graduation in Russian philology. Over one year has passed since then and, as we argue, if some of the questions have not yet been answered, Russian studies programmes in Poland are still in progress, and this can be examined, assessed, and perhaps adapted to teach within Russian philology in the context of the current political and social situation.

5 Findings and discussion

Most changes regarding, among others, the names of subjects taught, the number of contact hours allocated to them and ECTS credits in accordance with the system of Polish public universities in operation require several months' notice, but alterations to the content of individual courses, to detailed topics and textbooks used can be made on an ongoing basis before a given course starts. The first two questions in the survey concerned changes introduced in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Although only representatives of 8 universities confirmed the introduction of such changes in the ongoing study cycles of both courses or one of the cycles, the comments gathered in open questions and via e-mail correspondence show that coordinators of the educational process do not always have access to the detailed content of individual subjects taught by different staff members. It can therefore be assumed that certain changes also occurred on a more individual, course-based level. If changes were introduced in any

⁵ Ministry of Education and Science.

of the cycles, the respondents were asked to provide their overall description, which showed that the corrections concerned a) introducing content regarding the war in Ukraine and expanding the subjects regarding controversial issues in Russian-Ukrainian relations over the last two decades; b) avoiding topics that took on a different meaning in the war situation and could be considered controversial, such as Russian national character (hospitality) or state symbols. The type of changes introduced depended not so much on the attitude of the instructors, who unanimously felt the need to transform the content in the short or long term, but on the profile of a given course. By way of illustration, during practical Russian and translation classes, the sources or aids used for exercises were often current press and video material—e.g., excerpts from the *Skazhi Gordeevoy* YouTube series (Skazhigordeevoy 2024), interviews with famous people from the world of culture, such as Ludmila Ulistkaya and Sergey Guriyev. The updating of socio-political content also took place during academic courses on Russian society (e.g., media linguistics, political linguistics, modern history), and, as part of literature classes, more hours were allocated to the discussion of issues of imperialism and postcolonial criticism, or socio-political content—e.g., the works of Ewa Thompson.⁶ Classes strictly related to linguistics (e.g., descriptive grammar, historical grammar) or those related to more distant periods of literary history were less susceptible to changes, although even here references to the current situation were possible—e.g., one of the respondents declared that he had always discussed the problem of the political and cultural conflict between Ukraine and Russia and Belarus in the courses in history of the Russian language and media language analysis. The instructors tried to approach both the changes and the current teaching content with sensitivity, considering the fact that, at some universities, in addition to the presence of Polish students, there were also Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians in the same groups. Such a cross-national character of classes also required a lot of caution in setting group- and pair-based activities.

The next four questions concerned changes from a longer perspective—i.e., from the beginning of the new academic year 2022/2023. The first one concerned the background of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the modification of learning outcomes and the names of courses or teaching modules in Russian-philology programmes and plans. The learning outcomes were not modified at any of the universities, which is most likely due to the fact that their original version relatively conveyed general philological knowledge, skills and social competences pertaining to the broad realm of the humanities and language studies and could thus accommodate various content, because they were oriented towards language use, command of history, literature, practical and soft skills within the Russian-speaking environment, regardless of the changes within the political situation. In terms of course nomenclature, only a few changes were recorded. During the first-cycle, undergraduate, studies at the University of Rzeszów, the course in “Sociocultural Realities of Russia” was renamed “Sociocultural Realities of the Russian-speaking Area,” and, instead of the course on “Polish-Russian Cultural Relations” (an elective course), “Basics of the Ukrainian Language” was introduced (UR 2023). More serious changes took place in the second-cycle, postgraduate, studies at the University of Gdańsk and those concerned the reconstruction of the entire programme within three

⁶ A Polish-American Slavist from Rice University specializing in Russian imperialism (Rice 2011).

specialisations: 1) language-culture-media, 2) translation-communication-culture, 3) teaching. The new programmes now emphasise cultural and linguistic content rather than socio-political aspects (UG 2023).

The next four questions referred to similar changes (learning outcomes and specialisation offer) in the academic year 2023/2024—i.e., in a situation when more time-consuming procedures for programme changes could have already been implemented and the students' reaction was already known, as well as the results of the recruitment of candidates for Russian philology in a new socio-political context. The University of Białystok took advantage of the opportunity to introduce more in-depth amendments, where, starting from 2023, the specialisation called “Russian language – communication in business,” which had been taught for several years in the sphere of business, was abandoned in favour of “Russian language – communication in administration.” Therefore, the courses being taught have changed, and with them the learning outcomes have (UwB 2023). Although in their course offerings available so far, most universities have emphasised the practical dimension of Russian philology and the possibilities of using the knowledge of the Russian language in trade, the reciprocal sanctions and embargo practices introduced by EU countries and Russia after the outbreak of the war eliminated these benefits and forced a change in course offerings. Therefore, actions undertaken by the University of Białystok constitute a significant example of a change conditioned by the political and economic situation of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Equally far-reaching modifications were undertaken by the University of Silesia. For the sake of future recruitment, the department's administration decided to change the name of the field of study from “Russian Philology” to “East Slavic Philology” and to expand offerings to include Eastern Slavic languages and cultures. It was also decided to introduce specialisations based on the Ukrainian language in full-time first-cycle studies: “Ukrainian Language in Business and Administration,” and “East Slavic Cultures and Languages.” This has also resulted in a change and adaptation of learning outcomes to the new educational programme. Postgraduate studies are also conducted within the framework of East Slavic Philology, although both specialisations have incorporated the course in the Russian language. Yet, further modifications are not currently planned (UŠ 2023). At the same time, changes are being introduced at other universities, which respondents described as “independent of the Russian-Ukrainian war.” An example of such a situation may be the modifications already mentioned with reference to the University of Gdańsk and introduced in 2022, but planned earlier, or programme changes at Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin, where new courses were introduced to the programme in 2021: “Intercultural Competences,” “Knowledge of Contemporary Russia,” “Cross-border Intercultural Communication” (MCSU 2021).

Responses from representatives of other universities indicated plans to introduce new specialisations in the near or distant future, and sometimes there was no certainty about the future situation of Russian philology, due to the university's projects not yet clarified at the level of the university central authorities.

The last two questions concerned the decline in interest in Russian philology after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. All of the universities have observed such negative trends in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Recruitment was reported to have decreased to 50-60% of the average level in the period before the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. However, the impact of this invasion on the situation of Russian philology varied from university to university. In Warsaw, Poznań or Katowice the number of candidates was smaller, but the number of students still allowed for the organisation of 2-3 student groups for first-cycle studies and at least one for second-cycle studies. In Toruń, Olsztyn and Zielona Góra, where, even before the war, there had already been problems gathering a sufficient number of students to open new study cycles, and in particular years there had been no second-cycle studies there, after the 2022 recruitment, the university authorities either did not allow the launch of the courses due to the insufficient enrollment, or gave conditional consent to start the new cycle significantly below the student intake expected—i.e., for several candidates only.

The survey also showed that the size of the academic centre and the significance of the city or agglomeration in which it is based was important, but it was not a decisive factor, because in the case of universities in Rzeszów (198,000 inhabitants) and Białystok (293,000) the launch of Russian philology was not threatened, while this launch was jeopardised in the larger city of Bydgoszcz (330,000) and in Gdańsk, which boasts almost half a million inhabitants and functions as part of the dynamically developing Tricity agglomeration (with Gdynia and Sopot). Both undergraduate and postgraduate studies were conditionally opened for a smaller number of candidates. Therefore, it is a complex problem, and it depends on, among other things, the tradition of studies in a given field, the distance from the eastern border of Poland (see also Ćwiek-Świdecka 2024) and the number of students from the East (mainly from Belarus and Ukraine), but a decline in interest in Russian-philology studies is recorded throughout the country.

Trying to explain the current situation, our respondents have associated these trends with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the lack of opportunities to travel to Russia, the attractiveness of other foreign languages, the expected and actual lack of cooperation, but also with other, pre-existing factors. The respondents' answers show that the new geopolitical situation strengthened and accelerated this impact: a general decrease in the interest in the Russian language, the pandemic, the demographic decline, as well as a marked fall in the interest in humanities. At the level of second-cycle tertiary education, where the number of students is approximately one-third of first-cycle studies, not only in Russian philology but also in all fields of knowledge (cf., e.g., Bojko et al. 2019; GUS 2022; GUS 2023), the decreasing interest is caused by the following factors, in addition to the issues already mentioned: students believe that the CEFR B2 level of language knowledge achieved at the undergraduate level is sufficient for their current and future professional and social needs, and they are looking for new opportunities and directions for further education; they are also concerned that devoting the next two years to learning Russian in the face of the lack of trade contacts with Russia will not be worth their time and effort. People responsible for coordinating tertiary education in Russian philology are aware of this and state directly that “there is,

of course, a noticeable decline in interest in second-cycle studies, but this applies not only to fields/specialisations of studies with the Russian language – this is a noticeable trend throughout the country” or “The decline in the number of candidates is noticeable every year, so it is difficult to say clearly what the reason is. The political situation is certainly not conducive to an interest in studies in this field.”

The respondents also stated that students decided not to pursue Russian-philology studies after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, but only in some cases one can be certain that the political situation was the reason for these decisions. Apart from individual cases at all universities, when students stated directly that “in the face of the war, studying their major course makes no sense, so they give up further studies” or when students from Ukraine dropped out, lecturers noted that the number of students abandoning their programmes did not differ from the that found in the data collected from other fields or the average for a given centre, and the most common reasons for withdrawing from studies were unsatisfactory academic results, inability to reconcile full-time studies with professional work or random circumstances—e.g., family reasons preventing students from pursuing further studies. It was noticed that if the reason for dropping out was the war, the decision was made more often by first-year students who had less to lose than people who had already devoted more years to studying in a Russian-philology programme.

6 Conclusions

As the respondents have noted, the Russian-Ukrainian war began in the context of the already existing problems faced by higher education in Poland, and humanities studies in particular: the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns causing frequent changes in instruction from onsite to online (cf. Strugiecka et al. 2021), attrition for reasons unrelated to the university environments (economic and family issues, etc.), as well as more and more frequent scenarios of completion of tertiary education at the undergraduate level only. Therefore, even the largest university centres had had problems with recruitment to many majors at the postgraduate level. Polish instructors in Russian-philology studies had thus been accustomed to the constant necessity of modifying the curricula, or of the introduction of new specialisations to attract prospective postgraduate students (cf. Karolczuk 2024). Therefore, learning outcomes were flexible enough to be completed with different course content. The required modification after the sudden geopolitical change included taking into account the political conflict and cultural problems connected to Russia’s relations with Ukraine and Belarus, imperialism and postcolonial criticism, and a discursive analysis of contemporary media texts. Issues related to politics or discussing the achievements of cultural figures associated with the Putin regime were frequently removed from the programme content.

The planned changes for the coming years primarily stem from the reaction to the general decrease in the number of students, or from a given university’s programme and teaching policy. The latter varies at different universities, primarily in relation to the minimum number of admitted people that enables the courses offered to be started.

The respondents' comments show that, although university authorities most often set cohorts at 25 people, in 2022 and 2023, only a few universities met this requirement, and in the remaining academic centres studies for smaller groups were either conditionally launched or cancelled, especially if it had been only for several candidates. Ensuring intake of new students in such unfavourable conditions that make it impossible to employ the basic promotional strategy of pointing out the benefits of knowing Russian in future professional work in trade, tourism or translation and interpreting would require other effective solutions. One of them is the combination of Russian-philology programmes with courses in other East Slavic languages and literatures or, more broadly, Slavic studies in general, which has already been implemented at some universities. However, this depends on the instructional resources of a given unit and, when offering new language studies would require employing new specialists, which is not possible in light of the fiscal policies implemented by the administrations of most universities.

Another solution is to look for candidates abroad, especially in Belarus and Ukraine. Students from Belarus already study at Polish universities, but it is not a very large community, and at least not sufficient to reverse the negative trends in pursuing Russian philology, as this major is not their first choice, since they are fluent speakers of Russian. However, it was also hoped that the already small intake of Polish students would be supplemented, to some extent, by students from Ukraine. Although most Polish universities accepted candidates from Ukraine without additional fees, and offered scholarship programmes, as a matter of fact these students have very rarely decided to choose Russian philology as their major. As Arel (2018) notes, language loyalty already before the Russian invasion, especially after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, was an important determinant of national identity, and, following the invasion in 2022, the reluctance to use Russian has increased significantly. The process of a massive shift away from using Russian to using Ukrainian is being observed even among those young people who come from the eastern part of Ukraine, where Russian used to be spoken more often than Ukrainian in everyday communication in many homes (Yaremko, Levchuk 2023).

Without a change in the unfavourable geopolitical situation, it is difficult to anticipate a reversal of negative trends. It is therefore probable that, in the coming years, universities where Russian philology is no longer taught or is threatened will increase, and the presence of the Russian language will be reduced to optional courses or modules in applied linguistics or Slavic studies programmes.

To prevent the current student intake from dropping even further, urgent alterations to existing Russian-philology courses are thus a necessity of which academic coordinators at the tertiary level of education are becoming more and more aware. By way of illustration, at the Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń the traditional Russian-philology programme has undergone significant alterations to be implemented in academic year 2024/2025 (see UMK WH, programmes in Russian Philology and Culture Studies, 2024). The focus will be on translation and mediation as well as on a broader context of Slavic cultures, with two specialisations developed

in both directions (translation and culture studies). The former will offer courses facilitating the use of the Russian language as a professional tool for translators and interpreters, with practical Russian courses catering to the demands of a translator's working environment, supplemented with theoretical (literature, linguistics, culture) tutorials (and single lectures only). The latter specialisation has been conceived of within culture studies and comparative dimensions – with a stress placed on the combination of Russian with another Slavic language, namely Serbian.

How the political situation will develop is, of course, not clear, but, regardless of its direction, certain issues have already been redefined, not only in the Polish case, discussed in this article, but also in other local conditions. As Reagan (2023: 15) notes, changes in the curriculum of Russian studies are required, bearing in mind such issues as “the recognition of the ethnic, religious, geographic, and cultural diversity present in the Russian-speaking world.” These changes are taking place not only in universities in Ukraine (cf. Iashchenko 2023), but also in the European Union, as well as the more broadly-defined West. Continued monitoring of the situation in universities offering BA and MA programmes in Russian studies will enable the assessment of the effectiveness of the actions taken not only in the Polish case, discussed here in detail, but also in similar cases presumably found in the systems of tertiary education in other countries.

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POVZETEK

Ruščina ima največje število govorcev med vsemi slovanskimi jeziki, tako kot prvi jezik (J1) kot drugi jezik (J2). Je tudi predmet, ki se poučuje v šolah, rusistika pa je tudi priljubljena študijska smer v različnih državah po svetu. Po ruski invaziji na Ukrajino se je začela razprava o vlogi ruščine v slovanskih študijah in njenem mestu v učnih načrtih na Zahodu. Članek obravnava primer Poljske, kjer je bila ruščina dolga leta glavni tuji jezik v šolah in kjer je rusistika kot študijska smer še danes na številnih univerzah. Na podlagi gradiva iz anket, opravljenih med vodji izobraževalnih ustanov, ki ponujajo rusistiko kot študijsko smer ali predmet na Poljskem, ter pregleda učnih načrtov in kurikulov je bila opravljena analiza prilagajanja novim razmeram. Obravnavane spremembe niso le posledica političnih in gospodarskih razmer, temveč tudi demografskih vprašanj, ki povzročajo upad števila študentov rusistike še pred letom 2022. Na mnogih študijskih področjih se število kandidatov zmanjšuje, tako da veliko študentov ne začne magistrskega študija, temveč ga konča z bakalavrskim izobraževanjem. Poleg tega sta vojna v Ukrajini in nezmožnost uporabe jezika v trgovinskih in turističnih stikih z Rusijo še posebej pomembni za rusistiko. Dosedanje rešitve vključujejo na primer kombiniranje ruščine z drugimi slovanskimi jeziki, vključno z ukrajinsčino, opuščanje vsebin, povezanih z rusko državno simboliko, uvajanje tem o ruski opoziciji, kombiniranje učenja jezika s kulturo, in drugo. V članku so predstavljene rešitve poljskih univerz, ki lahko služijo kot izhodišče za nadaljnje razprave o mestu in obliku rusistike v visokem šolstvu v Evropi in svetu.