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A Lurking Cascade of Assimilation in Kiev?

Dominique Arel¹

Both Russian and Ukrainian elites have long believed that language can have a powerful impact on one's loyalty to the state. In the 1860s, a state official in St. Petersburg warned that the development of education in the Little Russian (Ukrainian) "dialect" could have the long-term effect of fostering a national consciousness among Little Russians, thereby endangering the unity of the Empire (Saunders, 1995).² In the 1990s, Ukrainian cultural elites proclaim alarmingly that, in order to survive as a state, Ukraine must successfully complete a process of "nation-building," whose stepping stone is the acquisition of the Ukrainian language by the citizens of Ukraine, first and foremost those with an ethnic Ukrainian heritage. In the view of cultural elites, people will begin to "think" like Ukrainians, and therefore identify with the interests of the Ukrainian state, only when their cultural world becomes Ukrainian (Kosiv, 1995; Zhulyns'kyi, 1995).

However "chauvinist," or "nationalist," these ideas may sound to some people, they may contain a grain of truth, if the abstract concept of "consciousness" is replaced by the more observable one of "political attitudes." For instance, in the 1994 presidential election in Ukraine a correlation appeared between regions and linguistic preferences, on the one hand, and voting behavior on the other. The winning candidate, Leonid Kuchma, obtained huge majorities in the predominantly Russian-speaking East, while the incumbent, Leonid Kravchuk, carried all but one of the provinces in the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking West (Arel and Wilson, 1994).³ Before turning to the results of this author's ethnographic research, we will survey pertinent aspects of Ukraine's ethnopolitical scene.

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²No Ukrainian schools were allowed in Little Russia until the Revolution.

³According to cumulative surveys conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology between 1991 and 1994, 77 percent of people living in the West use Ukrainian as their "language of convenience" while 82 percent of Easterners use Russian. Language of convenience is defined as the language respondents find most comfortable to speak in the course of an interview. The "West" refers to the thirteen provinces west of the Dnipro River, including the city of Kiev, while the "East" includes the remaining twelve provinces located east or south of that river.

LANGUAGE AND ETHNOPOLITICS IN UKRAINE

To explain the territorial polarization evident in the 1994 elections, most observers prefer to focus on the economy, rather than language, as the prime causal factor, on the assumption that the heavily industrialized East has suffered more than the West from the economic collapse, and so voted against the incumbent Kravchuk, whose economic record was poor. Yet a factor analysis of political attitudes, based on representative countrywide surveys taken during the presidential electoral campaign, indicates that the territorial distribution of orientations (factors) toward "national" issues (attitudes on relations between Ukraine and Russia, on the CIS, and on language policy) is polarized, while orientations toward economic issues are not territorially polarized (Arel and Khmel'ko, 1996).

In other words, East and West (when Ukraine is divided in two parts) are polarized in terms of language preference, voting behavior in the final round of the 1994 presidential election, and attitudes on the "Russian factor," but not on attitudes toward the economy. This is not to say that the economy plays no role in shaping attitudes and behaviors. After all, the Communist Party of Ukraine, campaigning on a radical anti-reform platform, saw the vast majority of its deputies elected in the East during the 1994 parliamentary elections. But of all the orientations identified by the factor analysis, only the "national" orientation could explain the territorial polarization.

The main concern of Ukrainian national activists is that Russophones, *i.e.*, those using Russian as their language of convenience, whether of Russian or Ukrainian ethnic background, identify too closely with what President Kuchma once euphemistically referred to as "Eurasia," a supra-ethnic concept connoting the historical, cultural, and economic unity of the three East Slavic peoples, a unity which implies that Ukraine must quite naturally continue to nurture close links with Russia. Russophones like Kuchma appear to sincerely believe that a natural integration within Eurasia can be obtained while preserving Ukrainian independence. Indeed, they view such integration as actually the best guarantee of that independence, since a policy of "isolation" could provoke a dangerous backlash among Easterners (the great majority of whom are Russophones). Nationalists in both Ukraine and Russia disagree, believing that a certain reintegration of Ukraine within this "Eurasian" fold can only lead to the restoration of the Empire and the loss of Ukrainian independence, a catastrophic development for Ukrainian nationalists, but a most welcome one for their Russian counterparts.

Ukrainian national activists ascribe what they perceive to be a reckless affinity for Eurasia on the part of the Easterners to a conscious policy of "Russification" pursued for three hundred years by the Imperial (Russian, Soviet) rulers in Ukraine. The highlights of this policy were repeated bans on the public use of Ukrainian language under the Tsars, mandatory teaching of Russian as a second language in all non-Russian schools after 1938, and the *de facto* hegemony of Russian as the language of higher

education, state administration and the workplace in the post-Stalin era (Solchanyk, 1985). These policies did have a significant impact on the linguistic choices of people. Cumulative survey data show that a massive inter- and often intra-generational linguistic shift took place among ethnic Ukrainians during the Soviet era. In 1991–94, close to half of them used Russian as their “language of convenience,” almost four times as many as those claiming Russian as a mother tongue (Arel and Khmel’ko, 1996). Among the Russians of Ukraine, the proportion of those indicating a language shift toward Ukrainian is negligible.

To counter this linguistic assimilation, Ukrainian national activists call for a linguistic revival—“back” to Ukrainian—as a long-term insurance policy aimed at developing a greater affinity or loyalty to Ukraine than to the Russian-in-disguise East Slavic commonwealth. The core policies of this “nation-building” project, carried out by what Brubaker (1995) terms the “nationalizing state,” are: (1) mandatory and exclusive use of the Ukrainian language in state administration and in higher education, both in the center and in the regions; (2) official promotion, in the media and in state institutions, of the historical symbols and myths of the Ukrainian nation; (3) the Ukrainian nation’s concomitant claim of “indigenoussness” on the territory or “homeland” of the new state; and (4) a policy of “disengagement,” or disentanglement, from the “Soviet/Eurasian space,” as is illustrated by the Ukrainian government’s sustained refusal to actively commit Ukraine to CIS structures and by the designation of Russian a “foreign” language in Ukraine.

Although in the first three years of independence under President Kravchuk, the Ukrainian state developed a contradictory and incomplete set of nationalizing policies, attempts to promote the supremacy of the Ukrainian language and symbols, or the perception that such attempts were being made, were sufficient to trigger a counter national mobilization in the East and to make the language and national questions major campaign issues during the 1994 electoral season (Arel, 1995). As noted above, attitudes on these questions were territorially polarized, indicating a worrisome link between language, “national consciousness,” and territorial cohesion in independent Ukraine. Ukrainian national activists appear to be in a bind. Without nation-building, the unity of Ukraine is at stake, but state-induced nationalizing policies run the risk of polarizing the regions even more.

REVIVAL, ASSIMILATION AND TIPPING GAMES IN UKRAINE

As David Laitin’s work (Laitin, 1989, 1996) reminds us, the dynamics of language politics during state consolidation cannot be reduced simply to a clash of collective interests by language or cultural groups. Nor will attempts by the nationalizing state to change the linguistic rules of the game necessarily bring about a political confrontation. Laitin posits that, under changing conditions, individuals may adopt strategies that, in the

long run, with the passing of a generation, can lead to outcomes inimical to the interests of their group. In a situation of competitive assimilation, non-titulars who had not previously invested in the titular language may feel compelled to enroll their children in titular schools to maximize their life chances, even though they would much prefer to retain the status quo and to rely strictly on Russian in their careers and formal interactions.⁴ Laitin's key insight, inspired by Thomas Schelling, is that people make choices based on what they expect other people to do. If a non-titular expects other non-titulars to enroll their children in titular schools in order to give them an edge, then the non-titular may feel that the interest of his family will be best served if he does the same.

Laitin (1989) has observed these strategies being played out in the past among migrant Castilian workers in Catalonia, with Castilian children socialized in the Catalan school system increasingly resorting to Catalan among themselves. The theory that undergirds our research within post-Soviet republics identified the intervening or independent variables—expected economic returns, in-group and out-group peer pressure, titular accommodation and cultural proximity—that enable or inhibit the inter-generational assimilation of non-titulars.

Laitin (1996) noted a puzzle in comparing the case of Ukraine to that of Estonia. Russians in Estonia speak a language totally unrelated to non-Indo-European Estonian, descend from a different religious civilization (Orthodoxy versus Protestantism), and constitute a large minority of the population in the Estonian capital, Tallinn. Russians in Ukraine, by contrast, speak a language so close to Ukrainian that many confuse the two, share the same historical Orthodox background as most Ukrainians, and form a mere one-fifth of the population of the capital, Kiev. Yet, according to a number of indicators based principally on the Laitin-Hough mass survey data, in the post-Soviet era the Estonian Russians appear to be at least as open to assimilation as the Ukrainian Russians. Cultural distance *per se* thus acts as a poor predictor of group behavior under conditions of state consolidation.

The main difference between the Estonian and Ukrainian nationalizing projects is that, in Ukraine, the linguistic revival is aimed as much at Ukrainians as at Russians, whereas in Estonia it affects only non-titulars. As mentioned above, close to half of the ethnic Ukrainians living in Ukraine feel closer to the Russian language, due to either a linguistic shift induced by the process of urbanization, or interlinguistic marriages. By contrast, a negligible proportion of Estonians has adopted Russian in their private lives. Hence, the extent of Russianization in Ukraine introduces a third major player into the language politics of Ukraine: the Russian-speaking titulars. This group, according to data gathered by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (footnote 3) is much larger (33 percent

⁴The term "titular," preferable to the politicized "indigenous," refers to the group after which a state or a particular territory is named.

of the population) than the group of non-titulars (20 percent) (Khmel'ko, 1995).

Divided among themselves, the Ukrainians implement the language law very feebly, except in Western Ukraine, where the proportion of Russian-speaking titulars is negligible. Unlike Estonia, residents of Ukraine whose active command of Ukrainian is deficient do not have to pass a language examination to qualify for employment. Moreover, upon independence, all residents of Ukraine were automatically given citizenship, without being subjected to a language test in the state language. The unwillingness of so many Ukrainians to use the language of their nationality in public domains can only lower the incentives for Russians to integrate or assimilate.

And yet, despite the apparent failure of the nation-building project and a continuous linguistic status quo of Russian hegemony (once again, with the exception of Western Ukraine), my ethnographic research conducted under the auspices of the Laitin-Hough project has led me to believe that Kiev could very well experience, perhaps within a decade or a generation, one of those "cascades" that Laitin modeled in his theory of linguistic assimilation. That is, there could eventually take place a stunning change in cultural practices emerging from what had appeared to be an immutable linguistic environment. Approximately ninety percent of first-graders in schools of Kiev are now enrolled in Ukrainian schools (Zastavnyi, 1994, pp. 447–48), three times more than at the outset of the national revival in the late 1980s, and five times more than the proportion of Kievans who use Ukrainian as their language of convenience at home. Tellingly, this drastic *Ukrainizatsiya* of the school network has provoked little, if any, debate in the printed media, despite the fact that by far the most popular daily in the capital, *Kiyevskiy vyedomosti*, publishes in Russian.

It is too early to ascertain whether the Ukrainian education of the vast majority of the new generation of Kievans will have an effect on their private interactions. Will they assimilate linguistically by, for example, starting to address each other in Ukrainian, as some Castilian youth are beginning to do in Catalonia? The quiet Ukrainization of the Kiev schools, nonetheless, suggests that both the Russian-speaking Ukrainians and the Russians of Kiev find it in their interest to integrate into the nation-building project, with integration defined as "a process whereby national minorities (here: the non-titular *linguistic* group) are brought into an active and coordinated compliance with the activities and objectives of the titular group" (Schermerhorn, 1970). The Russian-speakers, the vast majority of Kiev residents (76 percent), do not appear to disagree with the nation-building premise that an independent Ukraine must speak Ukrainian. At the very least, their children will be equipped to use it in public domains (integration), and perhaps in their private lives as well (assimilation). It must be emphasized, however, that since I cannot project whether the cascade in Kiev will influence choices in the East, I cannot now draw out the implications of this cascade for future state consolidation.

Ever since elections or referenda have been freely conducted in Ukraine, Kiev has always been a kind of enigma. In Eastern cities where Ukrainian

language is almost never heard spoken in public, the national movement has consistently failed to find support. In Kiev, where Ukrainian is quite rarely heard on the streets, national-democratic parties have always dominated the elections.⁵ Through the use of family vignettes, this article will attempt to elucidate the conditions that make hegemonically Russian-speaking Kiev so open to the linguistic revival project. Since the revival involves Russian-speaking Ukrainians as well as Russians, I will rely not merely on a Russian family, but on three additional Russian-speaking Ukrainian families for my illustrations.

FAMILY HISTORIES⁶

A Young Russian Couple, Both Fluent in Ukrainian

Yaroslav and Olga are young ethnic Russians, in their late-twenties to mid-thirties. Yaroslav is from Russia and came to Ukraine for his military service (performed in Central Ukraine). During my stay, he worked as sales manager for a foreign-owned retail store. Olga also was born in Russia but moved to Dnipropetrovs'k in Eastern Ukraine as an infant, and feels no "patriotic attraction" to Russia. She has a pedagogical degree, used to be a Komsomol activist, and gave birth to a son in the time between two of my field trips.

They both learned to speak fluent Ukrainian late in life: Yaroslav, when he found work one summer at a school of Ukrainian studies; and Olga, when she taught for several years in a rural, Ukrainian-language school in Central Ukraine. Yaroslav's views on the Ukrainian-Russian question would not please a patriotic Ukrainian. He considers Ukrainian a "dialect" of Russian, believes that, historically, the Ukrainians and Russians were a single people originating from *Rus'*, and would vote, if he could, for the reunification of Ukraine with Russia.⁷

Yaroslav learned Ukrainian when he had to and will speak Ukrainian to anyone who addresses him in that language. He will also send his son (born in 1994) to a Ukrainian school, since he expects higher education to be conducted in Ukrainian—the process is already under way—and wants to maximize his chances to get a college degree and obtain a good job. Despite his views on the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian people, Yaroslav appears to recognize that Kiev is not part of the Russian "homeland." When he talks of "*Rossiia*," he does not include Ukraine, at least the Ukraine that he really knows (Central Ukraine, Kiev). As for Olga, when asked how she defines herself, irrespective of the nationality that officially

⁵However, as in Moscow, the rate of participation has dropped significantly in the Ukrainian capital since the end of communism, falling below 50 percent in the second round of parliamentary elections for most districts of the capital in 1994.

⁶To preserve anonymity, some of the names of our "family" members were changed.

⁷It is an article of faith in Ukrainian historiography that *Rus'* was the state of proto-Ukrainians and that Russians evolved from Finnic and Slavic tribes in the north. For a recent discussion of the clash between Ukrainian and Russian historiographies, see Kohut (1994).

appears on her passport, she answers "Ukrainian, because that is where I am from."

A Ukrainian Couple with Russian as their Language of Convenience

Leonid and Ira are ethnic Ukrainians in their mid-thirties, although none of Leonid's four grandparents were Ukrainians and his conception of the world is totally devoid of ethnic categories, at least as far as Russians and Ukrainians are concerned. Leonid used to work in a textile enterprise until he was incapacitated. I met him as a "driver," *i.e.*, an unofficial cab driver. Since I left, he found work in one of Kiev's innumerable private banks. His Ukrainian is quite good (he evaluates his command as "4" out of "5"), but he rarely uses it and was raised as a Russophone. His wife Ira is from a village in Cherkasy *oblast'*, in Central Ukraine, on the Right Bank, that is, west of the Dnipro River. Her childhood and teenage linguistic environment were almost entirely Ukrainian and she struggled when she enrolled in a Russian-language institute of light industry in Kiev, where she met Leonid. She no longer uses Ukrainian in her private life and raises her daughter in Russian, but she reverts to Ukrainian when visiting her relatives in Cherkasy.

Leonid voted against independence in 1991 and would do it again, if he had the option, since he despises the local elite that has been "pilfering" the state since the Gorbachev years. But he cares little about what goes on in Russia, and mainly follows events in Ukraine. Despite having the utmost contempt for Ukrainian nationalists, he voted in 1994 for Kravchuk, the candidate backed by the nationalists, on the grounds that he was the best man to root out corruption.

A Fully "Russified" Ukrainian

Oleksandra is a young ethnic Ukrainian woman in her early-twenties, who was raised exclusively in Russian and has difficulty sustaining a conversation in Ukrainian. When we met, she had just graduated from an institute of foreign languages, with a specialization in English, and since then has found work in a private firm. Her parents were both raised in Ukrainian in a village of Poltava *oblast'*, on the Left Bank, but shifted to Russian as their private language when they attended university, the father in Leningrad, the mother in Kharkiv (Eastern Ukraine). Like Ira, they speak Ukrainian when they visit their parents in Poltava, but have used Russian among themselves throughout their adult life. Oleksandra's father was an officer in the Soviet Army and they lived in half-a-dozen cities, including a ten-year stay, in two installments, in Western Ukraine. Although they are all Ukrainian by ethnicity, Oleksandra's family was called "Moskaly," a pejorative term for Russians with the connotation of "occupiers," and Oleksandra even had to change schools due to the repeated taunts of her schoolmates.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Oleksandra no longer feels “at home” in Moscow and identifies with Ukraine. As with Yaroslav, when she has children she intends to send them to Ukrainian schools and intuitively believes that the Ukrainian language “will come back.” But she herself intends to remain a Russophone and will raise her kids in Russian. Like Leonid, she despises Ukrainian nationalists and voted against both Kravchuk and Kuchma in the presidential elections.

A Bicultural and Bilingual Ukrainian

Mykhailo is an ethnic Ukrainian in his early-sixties who is one of the most perceptive analysts of the national and linguistic question in Ukraine. A mathematician by profession, he was prevented throughout most of his life from practicing his true love, journalism, due to the nature of the Soviet regime and his sympathies with the dissident movement. Mykhailo is the quintessential man of two cultures. His command of Ukrainian and Russian is so good that he writes interchangeably in either language, depending on the circumstances. He uses Russian with his wife, because she came from a Russophone milieu, but raised his second son in Ukrainian.⁸ He was a longtime Ukrainian patriot who believed that the Soviet Union was an Empire and that Ukraine was destined to become independent. At the same time, he would have preferred to stay in Moscow, where he studied mathematics, because the opportunities for a scientist were much greater than at the periphery.

Mykhailo is perturbed by the anti-Russian undertones of Ukrainian nationalism: anti-Russian with respect to the Russian state and the dominance of the Russian language in Ukraine, not toward individual Russians in Ukrainian society. He believes that, in the long run, Ukraine will have to officially recognize that it is a bilingual society. But he is understanding of the notion that, for a transition period, the Ukrainian language must acquire a much larger space in official domains, necessarily at the expense of Russian. Mykhailo does not have an ethnic vision of the world, not because he is oblivious to ethnicity, as with Leonid, but because ethnic categorizations make no room for people who, like him, feel simultaneously part of two cultures.

These portraits hint at some of the diversity of “types” within Ukrainian society, and at the strength of the “pull” to ensure that one’s children acquire the Ukrainian language. But observation of these families, along with other evidence, allows us to assess the role of Ukrainian in the everyday life of Ukraine’s capital city.

LANGUAGE OF EVERYDAY USE IN KIEV

How dominant is the Russian language in Kiev? Mykhailo said that, in the 1960s, when he returned to Kiev after his studies in Moscow, to be

⁸His first son barely speaks the language.

addressed in Ukrainian on the street was the rarest of events, and interpreted as a dangerous sign that the daring Ukrainian speaker was a "nationalist." Ukrainian was heard only in cultural institutions, in select university circles, and in state ceremonies. Three decades later, in post-independence Ukraine, Ukrainian has not made significant inroads at the street level. Oleksandra said she never used Ukrainian in Kiev, except at the food market with rural women, until she went to an institute of foreign languages where instruction was being transferred to Ukrainian. She adds that all the business people she knows, without exception, use Russian. Leonid, who interacts with a lot of people in his driving duties, says he uses Ukrainian perhaps fifteen minutes a day, generally with a representative of the Ukrainian intelligentsia whose command of the language is stellar.

In my own field observations, spanning over a year-and-a-half, I estimated that Ukrainian language is used in public in Kiev perhaps only ten percent of the time. Yaroslav concurs with this estimate, saying that approximately one of ten customers at the store where he works wants to be served in Ukrainian. In official institutions, however, Ukrainian is expanding. A young political scientist once told me that he now has problems writing in Russian since his entire scientific environment transferred to Ukrainian several years ago. Universities in Kiev, both old and new, are phasing out Russian as the language of instruction,⁹ while the written language of state administration, although not yet the oral, has become Ukrainian. Mykhailo, who regularly interacts with state officials as a think-tank analyst, estimates that he now uses Ukrainian one-fourth of the time in these formal encounters.

Russian has historically been the language of the "city" in Ukraine (Polish, in Western Ukraine), the same way that German dominated Tallinn and Hungarian was the dominant language in Bratislava. While these cities have since been "conquered" by titular languages—Estonian and Slovak—during the urbanization process, no such linguistic conquest occurred in Kiev, despite the profound change in its ethnic structure: from overwhelmingly Russian/Jewish (79 percent) immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution to predominantly Ukrainian (72 percent) at the time of independence. The adoption of Russian by rural Ukrainians migrating to the capital suggests that Ukrainian was perceived as a low-status language. Since Ukrainian is still so rarely used in everyday life in Kiev, one would think that the low-status stigma has not yet been shed.

According to the results of the matched-guise tests conducted in Kiev in December 1993, this statement is both false and true, depending on the interlocutor. The aim of these tests was to establish the degree of status pupils ascribe to Ukrainian and Russian voices on a tape, without prior knowledge about the economic success or failure of the people speaking. We asked two young women, a Ukrainian native speaker and a Russian native speaker, to read a text first in their second language, and then in

⁹In Kiev universities, courses are increasingly taught not only in Ukrainian, but in English as well.

their native tongue. The pupils, thus, heard four voices, but they were not told that there were only two speakers. The pupils were asked to rate the voices, on a scale of one to five, along fifteen criteria (whether a voice sounded cultured, self-confident, intelligent, and so on). A factor analysis of the data indicated that most of the criteria clustered around two dimensions (factors): respect and friendship. Intriguingly, the voice that registered the highest score on the respect dimension was the Ukrainian native speaking Ukrainian. The lower score was received by the Russian native speaking Ukrainian. The two Russian voices were in between.

How can Ukrainian language simultaneously be ascribed high and low status? From my repeated contacts with the “families” introduced above, I concluded that people, in principle, do not at all mind hearing or using Ukrainian. But they mind a great deal if the Ukrainian they hear or use suffers from a certain degree of Russian linguistic interference, a phenomenon commonly referred to as *surzhik*, a Ukrainian word for the mixing of various types of grain. Leonid, for instance, believes that people should use Russian, unless they can speak a “pure” (*chisty*) Ukrainian. When I asked him whether civil servants should use Ukrainian, he said he did not mind which language they use, as long as they speak it fluently. Ukrainian and Russian are similar in the way sentences are constructed, so much so that one can pass from one language to the other almost imperceptibly, but the vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical rules are sufficiently different to confuse those whose command of the languages is not complete.

By all accounts, *surzhik* is pervasive in the countryside of Central and Eastern Ukraine and its use in an urban setting has long been perceived as a marker of one’s lower-class, rural origins. The tendency of most Ukrainian urban migrants to adopt Russian as their private language might be explained by a desire to shed their rural stigma, the same way that immigrants in America often decide not to speak their mother tongue among themselves in order to better acquire the language of their new country. There are different gradations of *surzhik* and, since Russian is so dominant in Kiev, the level of linguistic interference is generally higher when people attempt to speak Ukrainian. For example, a cab driver whom I met used approximately thirty percent Russian in his Ukrainian.¹⁰

Turning our attention again to the matched-guise tests, due to its rural connections one would perhaps expect the Ukrainian native voice speaking Russian to have been rated the lowest. However, our speakers were both born in Kiev, and the Ukrainian native speaker was thus exposed to a Russian-speaking environment, giving her a strong command of the language. The Russian native speaker, by contrast, was less exposed to Ukrainian and received low marks either because her Ukrainian appeared relatively deficient and/or because pupils detected that Ukrainian was not

¹⁰Having learned Ukrainian years after acquiring Russian, and being highly vulnerable to linguistic confusion, or ignorance of many Ukrainian words, my own level of *surzhik* would be fairly high on some days, especially when fatigue set in.

her natural language. To demonstrate a “pure” command of Ukrainian is a mark of education, and therefore of prestige, in Kievan society.¹¹

In the matched-guise test, the highest score on the dimension of education was obtained by the Ukrainian native speaking Ukrainian (UU), and the lowest by the Russian native speaking Ukrainian (RU). When asked what type of occupation they associated with the voices, only five of more than 150 pupils associated the UU voice with the low-status occupations of “worker,” “peasant,” or “housewife,” compared to forty-eight for the RU voice.

Chances are that Leonid would also have rated the seemingly RU *surzhik* voice on the low side. His greatest criticism of the main Ukrainian TV state channel, UT-1, was that it keeps showing these folk dance troupes from the countryside, “not even of a world standard,” as if he were ashamed of them being displayed so prominently. Even the recent use of Ukrainian voice-over for foreign movies irritates him, since “it does not sound natural.” At the same time, however, Leonid believes that the President of Ukraine must exclusively use Ukrainian abroad, since “you cannot travel in an imported car.” For him, Ukrainian is prestigious when it is used by high officials and people with education, but not in everyday life, especially when it smacks of rural culture. In the same vein, I remember being struck when a young Russian woman from Kiev used Ukrainian in inscribing a Ukrainian art book she offered me, even though she otherwise only used Russian with her friends, including me. It seems that, in that realm of high culture, Ukrainian is *de rigueur*.

In the recent past, Kievans were not friendly when they were publicly addressed in Ukrainian.¹² In this regard, a noticeable change has occurred since independence. A Western Ukrainian young woman who has been living in Kiev for five years uses only Ukrainian when she does her shopping and reports that she does not encounter a hostile attitude toward Ukrainian, such as “*Chtoooo?*” (“What are you saying?”). People behind the counter will still use mostly Russian, but no longer react with disdain at being addressed in Ukrainian. I myself observed such a shift occurring between 1990 and 1993.

Russophones have a strategy to reconcile their reluctance to use a subpar Ukrainian with their friendly acceptance of having an interlocutor use Ukrainian in a conversation. The strategy is to sustain a truly bilingual conversation, with one party using Ukrainian and the other Russian. Neither “yields” to the other. This phenomenon is quite common in Kiev and rendered technically possible by the syntactical similarity of the

¹¹A Western Ukrainian friend of mine who is involved in the Kiev business community tends to use Ukrainian on formal occasions. He senses that his Ukrainian gives him an additional authority, inspiring a certain degree of awe among his Russophone colleagues. People often mistake him for an expatriate—a Canadian or American Ukrainian—and are astonished to learn that he is from Lviv!

¹²In private life, however, all my respondents claim there was no problem when, say, the grandmother would speak Ukrainian and the rest of the family Russian.

languages.¹³ Bilingual conversations occur for either linguistic or political reasons. The Russophone or Ukrainophone may feel uncomfortable in the other language—a much more frequent case among the former than the latter—or one, or both, may feel compelled to speak their language in a given context, even if they are actually fluent in the other language. During my field trips in Kiev, I have met several Ukrainians active in the national movement who now would never use Russian in public, unless they are interacting with a foreigner and no other common language can be found. Such behavior is typical of groups all over the world engaged in a national revival project.

When I stayed with my friends Yuriy and Natal'ka, Western Ukrainians residing in Kiev, I could observe these fascinating bilingual encounters almost on a daily basis. Natal'ka was very friendly with her neighbor, Khrystyna, a young Russophone woman, whose ethnicity remained unknown to me. Khrystyna spoke only Russian, while Natal'ka spoke only Ukrainian. Apparently, it was the first time that Khrystyna came into daily contact with such "pure" Ukrainian and she enjoyed being exposed to it. Natal'ka would prefer that her husband Yuriy speak Ukrainian to people like Khrystyna and others in the courtyard, on the grounds that Russophones can understand Ukrainian.¹⁴ In informal encounter, however, Yuriy prefers to use the language of convenience of his interlocutor.¹⁵ Meanwhile, none of Natal'ka's social contacts, including at work, appear to be bothered by the fact that Natal'ka relies solely on Ukrainian.

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

In his theory of linguistic assimilation, Laitin postulates that people make linguistic investments based on three considerations: (1) expectations of economic returns; (2) the in-group status costs of "defecting" to the other linguistic group, *i.e.*, the extent to which one would feel negative pressure from his or her own linguistic community for learning and using another language; and (3) the value of out-group acceptance, *i.e.*, the degree to which one would feel accepted by the other linguistic group for learning and using the latter's language. According to Laitin's theory, the higher the expectations of economic returns, the lower the in-group costs of defecting, and the higher the level of out-group acceptance, the higher the likelihood that a linguistic group (in this case, Russian speakers) will reach a "tipping point," triggering a sudden, high level of integration (acceptance by Russian speakers of using Ukrainian in formal public domains: education, state offices, the workplace) and eventually, perhaps, of assimilation (adoption of Ukrainian as one's private language).

¹³In Quebec, by contrast, bilingual conversations using the more distant French and English languages virtually never happen; in Catalonia, where Spanish and Catalan are as close as Russian and Ukrainian, such conversations occur as well.

¹⁴In fact, by Natal'ka's own account, Khrystyna far from understood everything at the beginning, since Natal'ka's "pure" Ukrainian is in fact heavily Galicianized.

¹⁵Woolard (1989), observing behavior in Catalonia, calls this "the accommodation norm."

Expectation of Economic Returns

Even though Russian still dominates the workplace significantly, Kievan Russophones appear to expect high economic returns from learning Ukrainian. In the Kiev mass survey, 67.6 percent of Russophones agreed that it would be economically useful to learn the titular language.¹⁶ In addition, a regression analysis of the job status of respondents on their knowledge of the titular language shows that, for each level of increase in the knowledge of Ukrainian, the Russian respondents' job status went up by a third, the second highest score in our project (Laitin, 1996, Table 1, Row 8).¹⁷ When Kievan Russophones are asked why they are prepared to send their children to a Ukrainian-language school, the rationale they generally offer is that they want to maximize the career opportunities of their offspring.

At the same time, few of them are willing to use Ukrainian at work at the present time, largely because they do not feel comfortable in the language and are not pressed by regulations to make the transfer. Many state officials, who should be implementing the language law, themselves feel uncomfortable in Ukrainian. The *surzhik* factor is at play here: when not compelled to do so, people much prefer to use a strong Russian than a crippled Ukrainian.¹⁸ This could explain why, in the matched-guise test, the job status ascribed to the Russian-Russian voice (Russian native who is speaking Russian, or RR) is much higher than for the Russian-Ukrainian voice (Russian native who is speaking Ukrainian, or RU) (Laitin, 1996, Table 1, Row 9).¹⁹ Since Russophones mostly avoid speaking Ukrainian, *surzhik* is rarely heard in "respectable" occupations.

When "pure" Ukrainian is heard, however, it registers an even higher prestige than Russian. In the matched-guise test, the job status ascribed to the Ukrainian-Ukrainian voice (Ukrainian native who is speaking Ukrainian, or UU) was slightly higher than the score of the RR voice, with more than two-thirds of the pupils associating the voice with white-collar professionals and middle-echelon specialists. Russophones are on the

¹⁶Remarkably, the ethnic background of Russophones had no impact whatsoever on their perception, with Russophone Ukrainians and Russophone Russians yielding the same score within a tenth of a percentage point (67.5 percent and 67.6 percent, respectively). Laitin's Table 1, Row 10, gives a figure of 59.2 percent for Russians because the survey sample used in the table includes respondents from the city of Donetsk as well. That figure of 59.2 percent was the second highest score among Russians in our four successor states (Laitin, 1996, Table 1, Row 10).

¹⁷The regression analysis used Russians, as opposed to Russophones, as the independent variable, and included Donetsk Russians in its sample. In light of what was discussed in footnote 16, however, we can safely assume that the results would have been very similar had Kievan Russophones been the focus of the exercise.

¹⁸Yaroslav, who learned Ukrainian very well in a short period, is not really an exception to the rule since he was compelled to use Ukrainian in the two jobs he found since he moved to Kiev.

¹⁹The differential between the RR and RU job statuses in Ukraine was .949, compared to .225 for Kazakhstan, with positive numbers indicating a higher prestige for RR.

whole unwilling to change their linguistic habits in public settings, but they expect the next generation to behave differently, on the assumption that the latter, having gone through the Ukrainian school system, will be equally comfortable in Ukrainian and Russian, as with Mykhailo, our quintessential man of two cultures. This generation will, therefore, be free of the *surzhik* syndrome.

In-group Status Costs of Defecting

The matched-guise data showed that Russophones gain little respect from their peers when speaking Ukrainian (Laitin, 1996, Table 1, Row 13), with a score of .35 for the loss of in-group status, slightly lower than the score for Estonian Russophones in our comparisons. But we have already postulated that this was more likely due to the quality of the language (*surzhik*) than to the language itself. Moreover, on the education issue, the costs of defecting to Ukrainian schools were minimal, generating no mobilization among Russophones (in contrast to the situation in Eastern Ukraine) and getting little, if any, coverage in private media largely controlled by Russophones. It appears to be a non-issue.

Value of Out-group Acceptance

Russophones speaking Ukrainian also get little respect from Ukrainophones (Laitin, 1996, Table 1, Row 15), with a score of -.49 for gain in out-group status, the worst score among Russophones in our four republics. But one can hypothesize that the next generation of Russophones, socialized in Ukrainian schools, will shed their Russian accent and meld into the Ukrainophone group, possibly even to the point of adopting Ukrainian as their private language. My hypothesis rests on the observation that the group markers in Kiev among Slavic speakers (Ukrainians and Russians), at least among professionals, are more linguistic than ethnic. Kievans can easily identify the regional, but not ethnic, background of Eastern Slavs they meet, unless the region identifies the ethnicity. When my Russophone informants (Yaroslav, Oleksandra, Leonid) met Yuriy, my Western Ukrainian friend, who has been living in Kiev for ten years, they immediately knew he was from "there."

The same Yuriy was at a loss to tell me how many of his Russophone colleagues at work were ethnic Russians. He surmised there were none, but his wife, also a Western Ukrainian, was convinced there were at least two. "Maybe they are from mixed families," concluded Yuriy. The Eastern Ukrainian origin of a Kievan also is easily traceable. Yuriy commented that Olga, wife of Yaroslav, has a "typical Eastern accent" when she speaks Ukrainian, but people generally cannot tell whether the Easterner is Russian or Ukrainian. While visiting Donetsk, I asked a young woman, of Ukrainian ethnicity, how many of her friends were ethnic Ukrainians and how many were Russians. She said she had no idea and never cared to find out.

The ethnic lines between Russians and Ukrainians born in Kiev are blurred, with most sharing an Orthodox background and with interethnic marriages widely accepted by ethnic Ukrainians.²⁰ Also, most ethnic Ukrainian children now enrolled in Ukrainian schools come from a Russophone background. In light of all this, it is quite likely that, within a generation, Ukrainians who will have acquired fluency in Ukrainian will be ready to accept as “their own” Russians who have become fluent in Ukrainian in the same classrooms. If ethnic boundaries are porous now, it is plausible that they might become even more porous in the future.

In fact, Kievan Ukrainians appear to have more problems accepting Western Ukrainians as their own than they have accepting local Russians. Western Ukrainians do not speak “standard” Ukrainian, the official Ukrainian which was standardized on the basis of the Central Ukrainian dialect. Many among the Western cultural elite claim that standard Ukrainian is too “Russified” and prefer to use their Western-Ukrainian, mostly Galician, version of Ukrainian in publications distributed in Kiev, as well as in communications through the electronic media.

Russophones like Leonid and Oleksandra often showed irritation when exposed to this Galician Ukrainian. For instance, Oleksandra read Orest Subtelny's *History of Ukraine* at the library in Ukrainian translation. She struggled to understand the language, saying that there were “tons” of terms that are not used in Kiev—not surprising given the fact that the work was translated by a scholar from Lviv University. She wondered, “Why should we use ‘mapa’ instead of ‘karta’ (map)?” She also thought that Subtelny emphasized the history of Western Ukraine at the expense of that of the East. Oleksandra, an ethnic Ukrainian, feels much closer to Russians from Ukraine than to Western Ukrainians. But she is not totally alienated from Western Ukrainians. If she were to meet a Western Ukrainian in Moscow, she would feel closer to him or her than to the Russians around her. The distinction is internal to the state, with Western Ukrainians clearly viewed as “different.”

The young Ukrainophone political scientist referred to above confirmed that Galician Ukrainian is penetrating the Ukrainian “high” culture of Kiev. He said that the new Ukrainian-language private TV channels in Kiev do not use standard Ukrainian. As much as possible, they try to incorporate words that are different from Russian in an effort to assert the distinctiveness of Ukrainian culture, and thus of Ukrainian national identity. In his view, not everyone is happy with this Galicianization, since it is not even the language of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in Kiev—and sometimes not even of Galicians themselves, but of the diaspora, whose roots are mostly from Galicia.²¹ However much irritated, though, Kievans are not likely to mobilize over the Westernization of the Ukrainian official

²⁰More than 50 percent, the highest score among the titulars (Laitin, 1996, Table 1, Row 16).

²¹The Communist Party of Ukraine recently denounced “the aspiration of heads of state television and radio, of certain publications, and of some state and civic activists to impose on our people an archaic or dialectical language, peculiar to certain regions or to the western diaspora and which distinguishes itself from fixed norms of contemporary Ukrainian” (Presidium, 1994).

speech. It is a different story, however, in Eastern Ukraine, where Galician words are viewed as a symbol of the disproportionate impact of Galicians on the “national” question: language policy, relations with Russia, and the like (Wilson, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The article began with the assumption, buttressed by recent studies, that linguistic “identities” impact on political behavior over the “national” question: language politics and Ukraine’s relations with Russia/Eurasia. We then discussed a second assumption, propounded by David Laitin in the theoretical article in this issue, that under given expectations about positive economic returns and low status cost for acquiring the titular language, non-titulars will be inclined to integrate into a titular-dominated society. They will accept the rules of the game of the nationalizing state, such as resorting to use of the titular language in formal public domains, a process that could produce unwittingly an inter-generational assimilation: adoption of cultural practices in one’s private life, such as considering the titular language to be one’s language of convenience. To be sure, Laitin acknowledges that cultural proximity between the non-titular and titular groups would facilitate this process of integration/assimilation. But his theoretical emphasis is on the economic and social status benefits of cultural shift.

In support of his discounting cultural similarity as a prime factor, it can be noted that on the indicators for the dependent variable, recorded in Laitin’s Table 1 (openness to assimilation), the Russians of Ukraine are often lower than the Russians of Estonia in their willingness to integrate or assimilate. And this is so, despite the fact that Ukraine’s Russians are culturally much closer to ethnic Ukrainians than are Estonia’s Russians to the ethnic Estonians. Micro-level observations gathered during successive field trips suggest that, as far as Kiev is concerned, these data are deceptive and may be masking a quiet undercurrent of intergenerational acceptance of the Ukrainization of public life in the capital. On the one hand, Russians of Kiev do not feel compelled to use Ukrainian in public, both because the Ukrainian language law is poorly administered and because Ukrainians are divided among themselves over the necessity of making a sudden linguistic shift, with the great majority of them feeling more comfortable in the Russian language. On the other hand, the vast majority of these Russians and Russophones who have young children have enrolled them in Ukrainian schools in recent years, expecting that Ukrainian will become a prerequisite of social advancement in the near future. Moreover, these Russophone children already consider “well spoken” Ukrainian to be more prestigious than Russian, while Ukrainian poorly spoken attracts ridicule.

This ridicule explains the fact that Russophone adults are reticent to actively use Ukrainian. It also explains why the openness to assimilation of the adult generation is lower than might be expected, while that of the next generation is likely to be much higher, to the point of triggering what

Laitin called a “cascade.” The sources of this cascade lie in aspirations for occupational mobility, educational opportunity, and the social status accruing to well-spoken Ukrainian, and are in line with the factors theorized by Laitin to induce such a cascade.

My argument is that there are signs that Kiev may experience, within a generation of two, a cascade of integration and assimilation into the Ukrainian language. Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to make direct comparisons with a city of Eastern Ukraine, such as Donetsk. Due to time constraints, only Kiev was thoroughly investigated and the matched-guise test could be conducted only in that city, even though the author made a research trip to Donetsk and the mass survey was administered in both Kiev and Donetsk.

In Donetsk, the survey data show a fortress-like resistance to integration. In a referendum conducted during the first round of the 1994 parliamentary elections, 89 percent of Donetsk voters supported the proposition that Russian remain “the language of work, administration, documentation, education and science” on their territory. As late as the Fall of 1994, a single Ukrainian-language school served an ethnic Ukrainian population of 435,000 in Donetsk city, while for the whole *oblast'*, a mere five percent of schoolchildren were enrolled in Ukrainian classes (*Narodne hospodarstvo*, 1995, p. 398).²² Moreover, public opinion polls have consistently shown that at least half of the population of Donetsk, and of Eastern Ukraine in general, supports a reunification of Ukraine with Russia (Arel and Khmel'ko, 1996). At this stage of our research, however, we cannot ascertain the micro-foundations of this resistance.

One could argue that the Ukrainization of Kiev may act as a shining example for the Russophone East and trigger a belated and slower trend toward integration, creating a new cultural hegemony reminiscent of France (Laitin, 1996), a model much referred to in the Ukrainian nationalist press. But it is also highly plausible that the lurking cascade will be a phenomenon restricted to Kiev and the already predominantly Ukrainian-speaking Central Ukraine. Such an eventuality, more akin to the Belgian model of cultural heterogeneity, would further the polarization between East and West, with Kiev becoming increasingly dissimilar in its public face to eastern cities such as Kharkiv, Donetsk, or Odessa, and culturally reflecting more the “West” than the whole country. The question remains open, pending further ethnographic research in the East and the gathering of diachronic data several years from now that would enable us to discern trends. The aim of this project was to identify the dynamics of the language battle in the capital. And in Kiev, while the macro-level data show the resistance to change, the micro-level data suggest the early rumblings of a linguistic cascade.

²²While the proportion of all schoolchildren of Ukraine enrolled in Ukrainian classes increased from 54 percent to 57 percent between 1993–94 and 1994–95, there was no increase at all during that time for Ukrainian-language enrollments in Donetsk oblast, the figure for both years remaining at 5 percent.

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