

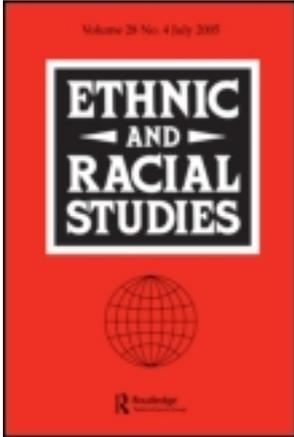
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Publisher: Routledge

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Ethnic and Racial Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rers20>

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Volodymyr Kulyk

Published online: 20 Aug 2006.

To cite this article: Volodymyr Kulyk (2006) Constructing common sense: Language and ethnicity in Ukrainian public discourse, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29:2, 281-314, DOI:

[10.1080/01419870500465512](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870500465512)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870500465512>

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Constructing common sense: Language and ethnicity in Ukrainian public discourse

Volodymyr Kulyk

Abstract

This article analyses influential presentations of language and ethnicity matters in Ukrainian political and media discourse. I focus on the competing attempts to discursively ‘dissolve’ the ideological propositions in supposed common sense in order to influence the latter. After examining an ambiguous legacy left by Soviet discourse and practice, I demonstrate how the post-Soviet regime’s ‘centrist’ project, which retains this ambiguity for the sake of social stability, prevails over the ‘national democratic’ discourse, which seeks to radically transform the Ukrainians’ common sense in accordance with the nation-state norm.

Keywords: Common sense; ideology; normality; discourse; media; Ukraine.

Introduction

For more than a decade since the breakup of the USSR, a number of authors have analysed the politics of language and ethnicity in one of its largest successor states, Ukraine, which is believed to be both crucially important for the sustainability of the country’s independence and interesting to scholars in view of a contradictory legacy left by the former empire. Most of these works have assumed the Ukrainian state’s policy to be an attempt to forge a new national identity centred on the titular language and culture, even though the authors have disagreed in their assessments of this attempt as a reasonable policy of ‘nation-building’ intended to ensure social cohesion (e.g. Motyl 1995) or undemocratic and conflictual ‘nationalization’ discriminating against the Russian-speakers (e.g. Arel 1995a). Some of more recent works qualified this policy as inherently ambiguous due to President Kuchma’s conscious subordination of identity matters to the tasks of

ensuring social stability and consolidating his personal power (Arel 1998; Wilson 2000; Wolczuk 2000). However, in order to translate this insight into a more adequate understanding of the policy's substance and impact, the research field should be widened in several important respects. First, it is necessary to analyse not only explicit statements but also implicit messages sent by the officials' words and deeds. Second, while the interpretation of the central government's contradictory moves as intended to appease different potentially protesting groups of the population makes sense, attention should also be paid to the meanings the *combination* of these moves might have for the silent majority. Third, in addition to the state policy and the official (or broader political) discourse, the analysis ought to take into account the contributions of nominally non-state practices such as the media, which are influenced by the regime's 'signals' and, at the same time, modify their impact on the population.

This article will hopefully begin the implementation of this programme. I shall focus on the attempts of the regime and its major opponents to use and, at the same time, influence popular beliefs regarding what behaviour of individuals and the state in the ethnolinguistic field is appropriate for Ukraine. On the one hand, deeply rooted beliefs of the population – taken to be mere common sense – always limit the range of policies that can be effectively pursued by the authorities or called for by the opposition. Explicit appeals or implicit references to the people's common sense are therefore routinely used for the legitimization of policies. On the other hand, the supposedly common-sense beliefs, although relatively stable and uniform, are themselves influenced by policies and discourses based on particular ideological principles, all the more so when these principles submerge under the references to common sense. In this text, I shall analyse how the competing elites try to discursively 'dissolve' their respective ideologies in common sense in order to transform it, while pushing aside the question of how popular consciousness reacts to this effort. The former task can be fulfilled by means of discourse analysis; the latter requires sociological or anthropological instruments.

I begin with a presentation of theoretical work on common sense, in particular its discursive construction and historical evolution. Then I examine the Soviet background of post-Soviet attempts to transform the Ukrainians' common-sense assumptions on ethnolinguistic matters. In the following sections, I discuss the relationship between the three most influential ideologies in contemporary Ukraine and show how one of them has had the greatest success in presenting its arguments as mere common sense. Finally, I analyse perhaps the most important factor of this success, the ideological work of the media.

Common sense as culture and ideology

The commonsensical notion of common sense can be presented as follows: ‘what anyone with common sense knows’ (Geertz 1983, p. 77). Although, as Geertz once complained, scholarly thinking often fails to problematize this notion, a number of authors, both before and after his writing, have treated this phenomenon in a way he considered more appropriate, namely as a ‘relatively organized body of considered thought’, a ‘cultural system’ (ibid., pp. 74–5). This work has been greatly influenced by the phenomenological writings of Alfred Schutz. According to him, the everyday life-world, a paradigmatic domain of common sense, is characterized by a set of fundamental assumptions and expectations regarding the nature of the world and the individual’s position as an actor within and upon it, which allow him/her to take these matters for granted. These implicit assumptions constitute one’s ‘stock of knowledge at hand’ which is organized in terms of relevance and typification. The application of these assumptions in any social situation is accomplished in the interaction between the participants (Schutz 1962). In this interaction, common sense is drawn upon as a socially approved determinant of the expected behaviour in the given situation and, at the same time, produced as a result of mutual unproblematic compliance with these expectancies. This process not only (re)produces common-sense knowledge of the society and thus the society itself as a reality perceived by its members, but also reinforces the participants’ sense of belonging to it as a universe of shared common sense (Garfinkel 1967; Stewart 1978).

The discursive dimension of social interaction is of crucial importance for the employment and production of common sense. In particular, the implicit common-sense assumptions play an important role in the interpretation by the participants of each other’s (and the production of their own) textual contributions, as they ‘chain together successive parts of texts by supplying “missing links” between explicit propositions’ (Fairclough 1989, p. 81). For the analyst, the gaps left in the text which the interpreter is to fill with these links are important cues for understanding what beliefs were presupposed to be common. Among many other matters, the assumptions taken for granted in discourse may pertain to the very medium of interaction, i.e., reflect (and reproduce) the participants’ idea of what language is appropriate in the given situation, what meaning the words may have.

Since the individual’s taken-for-granted knowledge of the world is mostly derived from other people and, therefore, based on the experience of predecessors, common sense of a society or a group is ‘a product of history and a part of the historical process’ (Gramsci 1971, pp. 325–6). Antonio Gramsci, whose writings, alongside those of Schutz, have been a major inspiration for the current scholarly

preoccupation with the phenomenon, insisted that '[c]ommon sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life' (ibid., p. 326). His influence has led part of the students of common sense to treat it as an ideological rather than a cultural phenomenon. The implicit assumptions perceived by members of a society as mere common sense are further problematized in this approach as reflecting views and values of particular group ideologies.¹ Moreover, 'the effectiveness of ideology depends to a considerable degree on its being merged with this common-sense background to discourse and other forms of social actions' (Fairclough 1989, p. 77). Rather than a neutral cultural tradition, common sense is presented as a result of the imposition of the ruling class' ideas on popular consciousness. In this perspective, 'ideology can bolster existing power structures by presenting contingent social relations as being natural or inevitable ones. Ideologies will produce historically particular forms of common sense, but this common sense will be experienced as being universal' (Billig and Sabucedo 1994, p. 127). The result of this ideological work is what Gramsci (1971) called hegemony, that is, cultural, rather than simply repressive, domination over subordinate classes and groups, which seeks to win their consent through various social institutions such as schools, political parties, trade unions, churches, the media, and so on. The dominant bloc's ideology thus comes to be adopted by dominated groups, all the more so because 'hegemonic ideology develops by domesticating opposition, absorbing it into forms compatible with the core ideological structure' (Gitlin 1979, p. 263). However, the hegemony remains an 'unstable equilibrium', a focus of constant struggle between the dominant bloc and the opposing forces striving to problematize its ideology presented as common sense (Fairclough 1992, p. 92).

Although Gramsci's theory was intended to lead the working class to create its counterhegemony to challenge the dominant position of the bourgeoisie and its allies, it can also be used by scholars viewing the societies they study as consisting of various overlapping groups, in particular numerous elites whose interests often contradict each other. It is clear that such plurality and contradiction do not result in a free competition among various ideologies and free will of self-conscious individuals to choose whatever assumptions they prefer. While hardly any ideology can be unequivocally accepted as common sense by society as a whole, there usually exists a dominant discourse type in every social domain, reflecting an ideology which thus has the best chance to get naturalized, that is, perceived as common sense (Fairclough 1989).² True, the view of common sense as mass consciousness influenced by elite ideologies poses a risk of reducing

a cultural common ground to specific group beliefs based on it (van Dijk 1998), and of postulating the unproblematic acceptance of any elite manipulations by the masses. The analysis must therefore focus on hegemonic struggle in particular institutions and varying degrees of naturalization the elite ideologies attain. For this purpose, it is necessary both to examine how the supposed common-sense beliefs are currently used in the discursive interaction and how the structure of everyday thinking reflects sedimentations from past theories and practices (Billig and Sabucedo 1994). Of particular interest are periods of social transformation, when different elites often have radically different ideologies and the popular common sense inherited from the previous regime cannot instantly adjust to one being imposed by the new institutions. In this case, public discourse displays both various sedimentations from the past and competing attempts at constructing a new, more or less transformed common sense for the future. If the transformation involves the emergence of a new state, its nationalism taking for granted the primacy of the citizens' identification with its 'respective' nation, is not yet accustomed and banal enough to become virtually unnoticed and unopposed as it is in the established nation-states (Billig 1995).

An important feature of common sense is that it does not necessarily prescribe a certain state of an object or a certain run of a process as the only possible norm; often, or even mostly, it defines a more or less broad range of possibilities as acceptable, 'normal'. Link (1999) conceptualizes normality as a Gaussian distribution on the spectrum of possible values of a given variable, where probability means the degree of normality which is the highest in the middle and symmetrically decreases towards the limits. This means that common sense is more concerned with acceptability than appropriateness, and in its realm the normal is first and foremost the usual. In particular, with regard to social matters, what *may* take place in a given situation is often substituted for what *should* take place, and what 'normally' *does* take place for both of the above. Similarly to other aspects of its relationship with social structure, discourse not only reflects but also produces normality: 'what "goes" as usual (normal), is thus constituted as normal reality – up to an absolutely extreme limit of "madness"' (ibid., p. 42). Therefore, the presentation in public discourses of what 'all normal people' do and think influences the audiences' perception of the acceptability of observable patterns. No wonder that the elites tend to manipulate the images of the usual – which they seek to present as neutral common-sense or scientific knowledge – in order to control popular attitudes.

The media discourse plays an important role in the (re)production of common sense due to its large audience unparalleled by other elite discourses, the intensity of its influence on that audience, and its

mediating role in presenting activities in other public fields. The very selection of 'newsworthy' facts to be reported and the modes of their presentation which are inherent to the production of the news, reproduce the criteria of relevance and typification which, as argued above, organize the stock of what is believed to be common-sense knowledge. Moreover, the intensity of the discursive production/consumption and its recurrent structure facilitate the merging of ideological arguments with allegedly neutral 'facts'. On the one hand, through their selection and display of the news, the media 'exert a powerful influence on public attention to the issues, problems, and opportunities that confront each community' (McCombs 1997, p. 433). On the other, the simulated diversity of voices and opinions effectively conceals the selection of ideologies admitted into the mainstream media (Fairclough 1995). No less important, the practices primarily intended to entertain, which have become prominent in both print and broadcast media, significantly contribute to the audience's support for, or at least tolerance of, the existing regime by backgrounding or 'domesticating' (Gitlin 1979) those aspects of social relations that could otherwise have evoked a critical response. Last but not least, due to the enormous amount of heterogeneous information which is to be made familiar for the readers/viewers and constantly reproduce their views of the world, the media discourse is uniquely suited for normalizing an array of social phenomena and practices that are compatible with the dominant ideology.

It is worth stressing, however, that the common-sense beliefs employed/produced in public discourse may not be simply 'read off' from texts, since it is the audience's interpretation that determines those beliefs' perception as 'neutral' or 'biased' and, therefore, their ideological effect (Fairclough 1992, p. 89). The text does impose its assumptions 'by so placing the interpreter through [specific elements acting as] cues that she has to entertain these assumptions if she is to make sense of the text' (Fairclough 1989, p. 83), but this placing can be resisted. Therefore, the assumptions embedded in texts can only be treated as proposals which readers or viewers (largely unconsciously) selectively accept and adapt to their existing common-sense structure. At the same time, these assumptions provide important material for studying both the common-sense stocks of the elites themselves and the ideological beliefs they seek to implant in the mass consciousness. How successful the implantation is depends on the proposals' correspondence to the fundamental cultural beliefs of society, the accordance between naturalization attempts in different social domains, the intensity of discursive influence, and the viability of alternatives.

Sedimentations: The legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy

In searching for historical sedimentations in contemporary Ukrainians' common sense, it is reasonable to focus on those beliefs derived from the ideologies and practices of the Soviet time. Not only is this the most recent and vividly remembered past against the background of which most people perceive their post-Soviet experience, but it was also the only past common to all Ukrainian regions, because it was only in the 1940s that they found themselves in one polity after many centuries of divided existence.³ As far as the beliefs regarding language and ethnicity are concerned, the interest in the Soviet sedimentations is further justified by the fact that a break with the previous experiences (for most Ukrainians, those of the Russian Empire) was especially visible in this field. While with regard to the ideas of order and authority the Soviet regime may be said to have reinforced an undemocratic legacy left by its tsarist predecessor, its record in ethnopolitics is mixed.

The Soviet nationalities policy has long been conceptualized as 'the arena of both an open and a veiled struggle between the proponents of greater centralization of political power and greater uniformity of culture on the one hand, and the proponents of wider political, economic and cultural autonomy for nationalities on the other' (Farmer 1980, p. 36). The principal shift of balance arguably took place in the 1930s when Stalin put an end to the policy of supporting the non-Russian groups' strivings for nationhood at the cost of playing down national self-expression of the Russians, which had been used by the Kremlin in the 1920s as a concession to, and a weapon against the non-Russians' nationalisms unleashed by the revolution. With the reversal of priorities, Russian national feelings were not only rehabilitated but privileged, Russians were granted the right to have their cultural demands met in any part of the USSR, and Russian culture was elevated to the status of a core value of Soviet society and an important part of cultural life of all its peoples. At the same time, national assertiveness of the non-Russians was checked with terror, the promotion of their identities and cultures was limited to the respective republics or autonomous units, and the linguistic indigenization was mostly abandoned in favour of bilingualism with an ever-increasing presence of Russian (Martin 2001). Since then, there have been a number of more or less significant changes in the policy implementation, reflecting the concessions to the demands of either of the two above-mentioned forces. On the ideological level, these fluctuations revealed themselves in an alternating emphasis on either the 'flourishing' (*rastsvet*) of the Soviet nations or their 'drawing together' (*sblizhenie*) with the ultimate 'merger' (*sliianie*). The latter emphasis was usually accompanied by a more resolute assertion of the leading

role of the Russian people and the unifying function of the Russian language and culture in Soviet society (Farmer 1980; Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990).

Scholars have usually examined the fluctuations in the Soviet ideology on the 'nationality question' as an effect and, therefore, an indicator of the power struggle between various groups within the nomenklatura and the party leadership's response to demands from the republican elites. The purpose of this section is the opposite. Instead of looking for novelties against the background of the familiar treated as 'redundancy' (Farmer 1980, p. 23), I shall seek to isolate relatively stable concepts and principles and speculate on what impact their decades-long prominence in public discourses and the realization in various social practices might have had on the common-sense assumptions of the Soviet people, the residents of Ukraine in particular. I shall also be interested in the effect of an inherent ideological ambiguity which results from the coexistence of contradictory orientations and, as Farmer pointed out, 'both reflects and facilitates the efforts of diverse groups within the society to mold official ideology so that group interests can prevail' (1980, pp. 36–7). It is, of course, not possible to ascertain just how effective Soviet ideology was in forming the citizens' beliefs, nor do I see it expedient here to discuss the factors determining its effectiveness. Suffice to say that although Soviet ideological discourse, especially in the last decades of the USSR, might indeed be a 'dead language' which few believed, it nevertheless greatly influenced the way people thought and spoke, all the more so because no alternative ideas and terms were allowed in public discourse.⁴

The most important effect of the ethnocultural ideology no doubt consists in the appropriation by the Soviet people of the very concept of nation as applied to the republican rather than all-Union entity. In tsarist Russia, people were primarily classified according to estate (*soslovie*) and religion. The developed ethnic consciousness was limited to the intelligentsia and some of the professionals, while peasants identified themselves first and foremost with their locality. Due to the religious commonality and linguistic proximity, the regime considered Ukrainians (and Belarusians) part of the Russian nation. Moreover, ethnic distinctions were blurred due to their coincidence with class differences (Suny 1993; Kaiser 1994). In contrast, the Soviet state imposed ethnicity as a fundamental social category (Slezkine 1996; Hirsch 1997). Since the 1930s, the Stalinist regime preferred a primordial understanding which implied ancient roots of nations and the fixed belonging of every individual to a nation that he or she had been born in (Martin 2001). While the omnipotent centre waged a ruthless war against the deviating activities of the non-Russian elites which were labelled nationalism, '[t]he continued existence of

nationally defined communities and the legitimacy of their claims to particular cultural, territorial and political identities . . . was never in doubt' (Slezkine 1996, p. 222). Although in the post-Stalin decades the proponents of centralization and assimilation sought to introduce a concept of an incipient nationness of 'the Soviet people' as a whole, the party leadership chose instead an intermediate formula of a 'new historical community of people' (Farmer 1980; Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990). Unlike the more ethnically defined 'nation', 'people' (*narod*) meant in the Soviet discourse both the statewide and the republican community, which were at the same time territorial and ethnic. But then a lack of clear differentiation between the two terms added to the ambiguity of both.

Compounding the effectiveness of the discursive presentation of the concept of nation was its institutional embodiment. During the above-mentioned revision of the nationalities policy in the 1930s, personal nationality was reclassified from freely chosen to inherited, and its unchangeability was further secured by its inclusion among the data registered in the newly introduced internal passports (Martin 2001). On the territorial level, nations were from the first years of the Soviet rule institutionalized in the so-called Union republics or various less autonomous units. These formations resembled European nation-states in that they possessed a number of administrative and cultural facilities intended to maintain, in many cases, create anew, the (putative) members' identification with the respective titular nations (Brubaker 1994; Slezkine 1996; Hirsch 1997). Notwithstanding the increasing administrative centralization and cultural unification, most of the nation-building institutions in the republics existed until the very end of the Soviet Union, in contrast to those facilities intended to meet the demands of the minorities (other than Russians) living outside of 'their' units, which were abruptly abolished in the 1930s (Martin 2001). While this abolishment, together with the regime-inspired inter-republican migration, created a contradiction between the territorial and personal dimensions of nationhood (Brubaker 1994), people remaining in 'their own' republics were not just allowed but mostly encouraged to preserve their national identity. However, the strength and prevalence of this identification was undermined by the ever-stronger promotion of the sense of belonging to the Soviet people, the latter gradually imbued with some nation-like meaning and often mixed with its Russian core (Suny 1993).

Another principle of the Soviet nationalities policy pertains to the relations between the 'socialist nations'. Since the 1930s, the effort to foster multi-ethnic Soviet unity was rhetorically presented as the strengthening of the 'friendship of the peoples'. This metaphor of the happy socialist coexistence of the formerly oppressed peoples was soon projected into the past to produce a vision of history featuring

common struggle against the enemies. Although all nations were considered equal in their sovereign rights, the Russians became 'the first among equals', liberators and/or civilizers of other peoples for which the latter supposedly felt deep gratitude (Tillett 1969; Martin 2001). Notwithstanding this turn to the incorporation of nationalist premises, the Soviet regime continued to vehemently denounce nationalism and prosecute its alleged adherents. On the one hand, the idea of equality and common fate of the Soviet peoples no doubt was appropriated, if to varying degrees, by mass consciousness in most parts of the USSR. Accordingly, most people seemed to reject what they called nationalism (often including even modest forms of national self-expression) as infringing on the equality and commonality. On the other hand, the prominence of nation in public discourse made many Soviet citizens view social relations in terms of competition if not antagonism between different nationalities. In particular, the indigenous population of many republics was largely prejudiced against Russians who constituted the lion's share of ethnically alien migrants (Kaiser 1994). In the case of Ukraine and Belarus, however, the negative attitudes were diminished by the fact that Russians were often not perceived as aliens, due to the similarity of languages and the presentation of the three peoples in many discourses as belonging to one Slav/Orthodox (often called simply Russian) community. This perception was most widespread in those regions, such as eastern and southern Ukraine, where (people classified as) titulars and Russians had for a long time lived together and mostly spoke the same language, namely Russian (Pirie 1996).

The final set of assumptions I shall analyse has to do with language. The original policy of the Soviet regime prescribed the fullest possible correspondence between language and ethnicity on both territorial and personal levels, that is, the dominance of the respective republic's titular language in the public sphere and the meeting of the individual's educational and cultural demands in the language of his/her 'nationality' regardless of whether this 'native language' was his/her language of preference (Slezkine 1996). However, the reversal of ethnopolitical priorities in the 1930s brought the acceptance of bilingualism in public spheres of the republics and an emphasis on the knowledge of Russian as the language of interethnic communication and state-wide unification. Languages other than the titular and Russian were at that time virtually excluded from the public use (Martin 2001). An even more serious deviation from the policy of institutionalized ethnicity was introduced in the late 1950s when a new law allowed the parents to choose the language of instruction for their children and made the titular language an optional subject for those learning in Russian. Given higher social mobility associated with Russian and the authorities' pressure in favour of the education in that

language, this led in the following decades to a considerable decline of instruction in the titular languages of most republics, Ukraine in particular. As a result, ever more ethnic Ukrainians spoke Russian as a first language and often had poor or no knowledge of the supposed language of their republic and their group (Szporluk 1981; Solchanyk 1985).

It is during these decades that the beliefs regarding normal linguistic competence and behaviour of Soviet people were formed or rooted, which would later be inherited by post-Soviet societies. To begin with, it came to be taken for granted that everybody speaks or at least fully comprehends Russian (which was actually not the case, see Kaiser 1994). Accordingly, the use of Russian in official institutions and in private communication between speakers of different languages was perfectly appropriate, all the more so because it was accepted that the Russians usually do not speak the languages of other nationalities. In Ukraine, the use of Russian went far beyond individual communicative preferences. In the cities (except for the western regions) it became the primary or even the only language of most social practices. Its dominance was so overwhelming that the speaking of Ukrainian came to be perceived either as a reflection of rural backwardness or a manifestation of nationalist feelings (Motyl 1987). At the same time, the Ukrainian language was by no means illegitimate. Not only was its existence as a separate language unequivocally accepted, which in itself constituted a tremendous change in comparison with the tsarist practice of treating it as a dialect of Russian and banning its use in most public domains (Solchanyk 1985). It was also accepted as an important characteristic of the nation and a crucial means of its self-expression, a belief supported by a number of institutions of the Ukrainian SSR using its titular language exclusively or on a par with Russian. On an individual level, Ukrainian was perceived as a natural 'native language' of ethnic Ukrainians, the fact demonstrated by the declarations of an overwhelming majority of the group in the decennial censuses. However, the correspondence between ethnicity and language ceased to be the only conceivable norm, as ever more Ukrainians chose to change 'native language' without changing the 'nationality' (Szporluk 1981). Moreover, while speaking one's 'native language' might be an ideal *norm*, deviating from it in public communication for the sake of effectiveness or social conformity, i.e. using Russian, was part of *normality*, all the more so because the latter language was far from foreign for most Ukrainians. As for the languages of other nationalities, they were to remain silent. Although equal in principle, their public use would be abnormal.

To summarize, the Soviet nationalities policy has left a significant but ambiguous sedimentation in the stock of taken-for-granted knowledge of the Ukrainian people. Having imposed the belief in

the existence of primordial nations and their intimate relation to the eponymous languages, this policy failed to make it obvious and banal for the Soviet citizens what consequences their supposed belonging to one of those nations had for their cultural orientation and social behaviour. The contradiction between the nation-building efforts on the republican and statewide/East Slavic levels impeded the naturalization of the passport Ukrainians' ethnocultural identification and of its link to the language they spoke. Ambiguity of norms and ambivalence of attitudes was a crucial part of the Soviet legacy in the domain of language and ethnicity. On the one hand, this legacy paved the way for attempts to renounce normality in favour of a norm and to impose the latter into social practice as a reflection of common sense which had allegedly been violated. On the other, it made such attempts constrained by the very ambivalence they would seek to overcome, as common sense persisted in contradictory beliefs which it did not consider mutually incompatible.

An attempt at nationalization

The first such attempt was launched in the late 1980s, as soon as the liberalization initiated by Gorbachev made it possible for various elites and emerging social movements to publicly articulate their ideas and interests. Although drawing heavily on the common sense moulded by Soviet discourses and practices, the nationalist-minded elites failed to transform it into unequivocally 'national'. Not only were large segments of the population reluctant to drop their loyalty to the Russian language and culture but also the rival elites took advantage of this reluctance to wrest political power and put an end to the nationalization project.

In Ukraine, as in many other Soviet republics, the cultural elites, particularly the writers, were the first to use the new opportunities to present their ideology on ethnicity and language and try to make it generally accepted, perceived as common sense. These elites had in earlier periods of the Soviet rule resisted as actively as possible the above-mentioned deviations from the institutionalization of nationhood, most notably in education (Solchanyk 1985). During *perestroika*, they moved from legitimizing proposed policies by their alleged correspondence to 'the Leninist norms of the nationalities policy' (violated, it was argued, by the Stalinist and later regimes) to portraying them as the only conceivable norm every nation must live by (Kulyk 1998). That they treated the Ukrainians as a nation (to be) like any other was but one example of these elites' use and transformation of the beliefs naturalized by the Soviet practices. Their view of a nation was an ethnonationalist one, including the unity of language and culture, the prevalence of national identity over any

other identities that an individual might have and the possession of, or striving for an independent state (originally, they called for the actualization of the Ukrainian statehood within the USSR). As the cultural elites moved from appeals to the leadership of the Ukrainian SSR to resolute opposition, their discourse blended with that of dissidents, who joined them in a new popular movement called *Rukh*, and acquired elements of Western human-rights language. Still the position of this so-called national-democratic movement on the nationality issue was oriented mostly towards the Soviet experience of the 1920s (Kulyk 2001a).

On the national level, the norm envisaged by the 'national democrats'⁵ was that of a (supposedly democratic) nation-state in which the language and culture of the 'revived' titular group would dominate in all social domains. Ukrainian was to replace Russian in the role of a language everybody would understand and speak both in official and, as a rule, interpersonal communication. This role was to be legalized by means of granting the titular language the status of the sole official (state) language of Ukraine. As for the (non-Russian) ethnic minorities whose 'national revival' was also called for, their languages and cultures would be used within regions of their compact settlement and in some cultural activities outside such regions. The Russians whose exceptional scope of ethnocultural rights was considered a result of the Russification policies, were to become a minority like any other (Kulyk 1999). Accordingly, the use of the Russian language beyond the minority activities was abnormal, which the nationalists stressed by referring to it, particularly after the breakup of the USSR, as a 'foreign' or a 'neighbour's' language. Another discursive means of introducing the nation-state norm was the interchangeable use of the adjective 'Ukrainian' in the ethnic and territorial/civic sense, which enabled the substitution of the former sense for the latter and, therefore, the reduction of society to the titular group.

On the individual level, the norm that the 'national democrats' strove for consisted in the full correspondence between ethnicity and language which would require a 'de-Russification' of Russophone Ukrainians and members of minorities. Since the first years of *perestroika*, writers called for abolishing the parental choice regarding the language of instruction which had undermined such correspondence, and for the use of administrative means to ensure that all children were taught in languages of their respective nationalities and learn Ukrainian at least as one of the subjects. Drawing on the naturalized understanding of native language, they presented the current situation as a clear violation of common sense which thus had to be restored by all possible means. In the words of an authoritative writer Oles Honchar, '[t]o learn or not to learn a native language in

school – this question cannot arise in any civilized country’ (quoted in Slezkine 1996, p. 228; see also Kulyk 1998).⁶ The two levels were interrelated, because the nation-state required a dominant core (ethno)nation which, in turn, was impossible without the de-Russification of millions of ethnic Ukrainians who had come to speak Russian as a first language. The realization of such a large-scale transformation of Ukraine and Ukrainians soon came to be viewed as only possible within a ‘normal’, that is, independent state for which, in turn, it would be the primary duty.

Initially, the ruling elite of the Ukrainian SSR, the nomenklatura, resisted the opposition’s ideological novelties which undermined its power monopoly in the republic. In particular, the official discourse stressed the ‘multinational’ nature of Ukrainian society and viewed the use of both languages in the republic legitimate. But then the existence of the ‘Ukrainian socialist nation’ and the importance for its members of their ‘native’ language and culture were taken for granted and thus further confirmed. Moreover, the Ukrainian nomenklatura following the guidelines set by the Moscow leadership and/or precedents of other republics, had soon to agree that the current state of affairs in the ethnic and linguistic spheres was far from normal and that urgent measures were necessary to promote the titular language and culture. Although it refused to put an end to the practice of language choice in education, it endorsed the opposition’s more radical call for proclaiming Ukrainian the state language of the republic and thus making its use in all public areas obligatory (Kulyk 1999). However, contrary to the cultural elites, most members of the nomenklatura did not view this move as the transition to a purely Ukrainian-language public sphere. According to the language law of October 1989, Russian was to retain its legitimacy in virtually all social practices as a ‘language of interethnic communication of [the] peoples of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’ (Law 1989, [preamble]; see also Arel 1995b). Not only was the nomenklatura’s position crucial for the implementation of the declared changes, but it also influenced the popular perceptions of their reasons and substance to a much higher degree than that of the opposition, as it was disseminated through much more powerful communicative means. At most, the opposition was able to undermine the perception of the accustomed slogans and practices as based on common sense, but not to implant its own view as an alternative, ‘true’ norm. Its nation-state programme was unequivocally supported only by those parts of the population that had not accepted the normality of Russification, first and foremost the residents of the western region of Galicia where a Ukrainian nationalist tradition was still alive, and the Ukrainophone intelligentsia who had long opposed the Russification policies (Kuzio and Wilson 1994).

Later, however, the Ukrainian nomenklatura became more susceptible to the nationalist ideas as it realized that this would help it counter the opposition's claim to power and, at the same time, wrest more power from the Moscow centre. To be sure, this meant that it was much more preoccupied with independence and social stability than the ethnocultural essence of the Ukrainian state. In particular, the official discourse stressed the equality of all citizens regardless of ethnic origin and their rights to protect and develop their respective languages and cultures. Moreover, the nomenklatura's leader Leonid Kravchuk, who was elected president simultaneously with the popular endorsement of the Act of independence in December 1991, refrained from resolutely introducing Ukrainian as the official language for fear of provoking mass discontent (Arel 1995a; 1995b). At the same time, the need to legitimize the rather unexpected independence and the nomenklatura's right to rule the new Ukraine made his regime incorporate most elements of the opposition's ideology of 'national revival'. The president encouraged the implanting in public consciousness of nationalist myths and traditions, particularly those relating to the history of Ukraine in its resistance to Russia's imperial policies and struggle for independence (Motyl 1995). Among other tasks, the nationalist discourse of history was designed to legitimize foreign policies oriented towards Ukraine's 'return' to Europe and opposition to any integration initiatives of the allegedly still imperialist Russia. Further, the legislation and the official discourse on national minorities, while providing for a broad scope of ethnocultural rights and welcoming their realization, were oriented towards the nation-state model. In particular, they treated Russians as an ordinary minority and did not provide any privileged status for the Russian language to substitute for its lost Union-wide legitimacy. Nor did they envisage cultural rights based on identity other than ethnic thus, in effect, denying the existence of millions of Russophone Ukrainians (Kulyk 1999). In accordance with this orientation, the campaign to bring the language of instruction in schools 'into optimal concordance with the national composition of the population in each region' which was launched by the Ministry of Education in 1992 (Arel 1995a, p. 174), sought to 'de-Russify' education and, by this means, society.

These and other policies embodying the nation-state norm produced a radical break with that part of the common-sense assumptions of former Soviet people which prescribed close ties between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples and the unrestricted currency if not primacy of the Russian language and culture. For many people, first and foremost ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers, the limits of normality appeared to be transcended and, therefore, they were unable and unwilling to quickly adjust to the new discourse and practice. This is all the more so because some elites, especially in the predominantly

Russophone east and south, sought to discursively present the nation-building course by President Kravchuk as unacceptably 'nationalist' and mobilize the population for opposing it. This largely contributed to Kravchuk's defeat in the 1994 election, mostly due to the votes of Russians and Russophone Ukrainians (Arel 1995a). The new President Leonid Kuchma was critical of his predecessor's orientation towards the unchallenged domination of the Ukrainian language in the public sphere and the integration into the Western structures at the cost of economic and political ties with Russia. In his inaugural speech, he called for granting the Russian language a special legal status (it was called 'official', in contrast to the status of Ukrainian as the 'state' language, though the difference between the two was never described) as well as for Ukraine's reorientation towards closer cooperation with Russia (Persha sesiiia 1994).

However, the new president did not lead Ukraine back to the USSR and the dominance of Russian as many had expected with either fear or hope. Driven both by the logic of state-building and the necessity to get the parliamentary support of the 'national democrats' for his effort to implement economic and political reform (the latter being partly aimed at consolidating his personal power), he largely continued Kravchuk's moderate nationalizing course. This continuity was demonstrated, in particular, in the progress, however slow, of the Ukrainianization of education, the gradual introduction of Ukrainian as a language of state institutions, even though in many cases only a written one, and the consolidation of the titular nation and language's special place in the post-Soviet Constitution adopted in 1996. Even more noticeable was Kuchma's failure to implement his calls for elevating the status of the Russian language in Ukraine and prioritizing relations with Russia (Kulyk 1999; Wolczuk 2001). However, important changes did take place both in policy and discourse. While it used some nationalist myths and symbols to help legitimize Ukrainian independence, the new administration mostly abandoned the anti-Russian elements in the historical narrative which, although directed against empires rather than the people, had inevitably affected ethnic Russians' feelings. At the same time, the Soviet figures and traditions were embraced as an 'inseparable part of our history', while contentious issues of the past were possibly omitted in the official discourse (Wolczuk 2000; Kulyk 2001a). Moreover, Kuchma was sending different messages to different regions and groups. In particular, when visiting the west and the east, he spoke different languages and attended ceremonies with different ideological meaning.

Taken together, the changes in the regime's discourse and practice amounted to the adoption of a different ideology on ethnolinguistic issues running counter to the national-democratic one. It hardly constituted a coherent set of principles but, as I argue below, it was not

meant to. This allegedly non-ideological ideology came to penetrate public discourse and thus stood a better chance of influencing mass consciousness than its national-democratic predecessor/rival had ever done. No wonder that it greatly contributed to the marginalization of the latter.

A 'centrist' alternative

Prior to focusing on ethnolinguistic assumptions of the Kuchma regime's ideology, I will outline its general profile and the way it positions itself in Ukrainian public discourse. The best way to view this hegemonic project is to analyse the regime's dealing with its two strongest challengers, the Communists and the 'national democrats'.

During the Kravchuk and the early Kuchma years, the ideological profile of Ukrainian political discourse and, to a considerable degree, public discourse in general was determined by the confrontation between the 'national democrats' and self-declared nationalists, on the one hand, and the leftists, first and foremost the Communists, on the other. For either force, the criticism of the other's ideology and political practice was an important means of evoking support from its constituency. Moreover, in order to prevent the realization of the primary opponent's allegedly dangerous plans, both sought to influence the position of the authorities. For the authorities themselves, this confrontation was very beneficial as it prevented the two most influential political forces from focusing on the criticism of the regime and opposition to its moves. While during the initial period of independence the weak executive had to make concessions to 'national democrats' or leftists for fear of mass mobilization and social instability, its strengthening under Kuchma made it possible for the president to use the confrontation between the two forces for the purpose of checking and marginalizing them.

At the same time, the regime discursively presented both influential forces as dangerous extremes, to which the power-holders thus appeared to be a centrist alternative oriented towards social accord and stability. A centre implied in this discourse was not so much a certain position on politico-ideological spectrum as a medium point of the Gaussian curve of normality, which supposedly represented mere common sense shared by all members of society, in contrast to clearly partisan 'flank' beliefs doomed to conflict with each other. To make the citizens prefer however bad 'peace' to any 'good war' for the triumph of principles, the 'centrist' discourse used and instigated their fear of any conflicts which, they were told, would inevitably be destructive and bloody and only cause changes for the worse (Kulyk 2001b; Riabchuk 2003). Beyond the supposedly common values of stability and wellbeing, the ideological parameters of the self-declared

centre remained ambiguous, which made it possible for the authorities to justify whatever alliance they needed at a given moment and present any political force as a threat. Both Communists and 'national democrats' were in different periods chosen for the position of the primary other, but there was a significant difference in the regime's treatment of the two forces and in their own policies towards it.

The legitimacy of the former *nomenklatura's* rule over independent Ukraine was originally based, as in most other post-Soviet states, on its rejection of the communist ideology and adoption of the national-democratic (moderate nationalist and anti-totalitarian) one. Later the ruling elite not only reincorporated many elements of the Soviet ideology but also partly substituted the imperative of normality and stability for the national-liberation legitimization. In other words, independence came to be justified not so much by the centuries-long struggle as by the normality of an independent state for every nation and the very reality of independence, a change of which would have disastrous consequences. Nevertheless, the Communist party remained the primary ideological opponent of the 'centrist' authorities, which could not renounce their positive attitude towards independence and the process leading to it, the break-up of the USSR. Therefore, the Communists, who strove for the support of a part of the population that did not share this attitude, consistently denied the desirability and normality of the process and its result, Ukraine allegedly moving towards capitalism and away from Russia. They resorted to what Halliday (1978) called an 'anti-language', meaning a discourse which consistently rejects terms and relations being imposed by the dominant discourse types and presents its own, clearly opposing the former.⁷ This overtly ideological language that did not seriously attempt to adjust to the changes in social realities and popular attitudes had limited effect outside its target audience, i.e. the people sharing its premises. It is true that in spite of the polarity of the declared ideological orientations, the authorities and the Communists repeatedly cooperated on important political issues. Moreover, the accustomed role of the Communist party as an implacable enemy of the post-Soviet Ukrainian state made its opposition comfortable for the regime, which could thus claim the merit of defending independence and social stability against a 'red revenge' (Wilson 2003). At the same time, the naturalization of this role reflected the widespread recognition of a gap between the communist tenets and the beliefs held by most Ukrainian citizens, the post-Soviet transformation of which the Communists, therefore, could hardly influence.

For the 'national democrats', the regime's adoption of their ideology meant the loss of their ideological and political niche. They came to be widely perceived as the former *nomenklatura's* ally and held responsible for the deplorable economic situation which was believed to result

from the implementation of their programme. Accordingly, their popularity sharply decreased. The 'national-democratic' parties failed to respond to this challenge by revising their ideology to make it appropriate for the conditions of independence, or by declaring the unequivocal opposition to the regime discrediting their ideas. These parties mostly preferred to operate within the regime, not only because of the fear that their opposition would endanger the still fragile independence, but also because of their hopes to influence the formation of the official ideology and its implementation in practice. While the combination of lobbying and occasional protest no doubt contributed to the authorities' partial adherence to the nationalizing course under both Kravchuk and Kuchma, the attempts to overtly challenge their allegedly anti-Ukrainian policy repeatedly failed (Kubicek 1999; Kulyk 1999). With the passage of time, however, the Kuchma regime became increasingly reluctant to cooperate with the 'national democrats' because it no longer needed their support for countering the left and even considered their influence more dangerous for its survival than that of the Communists. Accordingly, the official discourse sought to marginalize the former allies by portraying their ideas and actions as extreme and/or representing the interests of western Ukraine only, hence unacceptable for the rest of the country.⁸

Nevertheless, as argued above, the regime could not afford renouncing the national-liberation narrative altogether, as it would have undermined its own legitimacy. This, in turn, enabled the 'national democrats' to present their ideology as a version of the one officially proclaimed, rather than a consistent alternative to it. In effect, the 'centrists' and the 'national democrats' competed with each other aiming to implant their respective interpretations of the nationalist ideology into mass consciousness. Both parties presented their versions as based on common sense, that is, the common sense of the post-Soviet Ukrainian citizens which, in turn, had by then been heavily influenced and transformed by that ideology and the social practice largely enacting it. At the same time, the competition between the two discourses largely determined the further (re)construction of that common sense. The 'national democrats' still sought to impose a clear nation-state norm, while the 'centrists' did their best to preserve the ambiguous normality combining independence with the Soviet legacy.

The 'centrist' normalization of the ethnolinguistic sphere

As far as ethnolinguistic problems are concerned, two key aspects where the orientations of the 'national democrats' and the 'centrists' rather radically differed from each other were the degree of ethno-cultural Ukrainianness of the state and the scope of the use of the

Ukrainian language in society. With regard to the former, neither party questioned, on the one hand, the principle of equality of civil and ethnocultural rights of the members of all ethnic groups or, on the other, the state's responsibility for the preservation and development first and foremost of the Ukrainian language and culture. What differed were their positions on the way of reconciling the two premises. The 'national democrats' wanted a nation-state which would use the Ukrainian ethnocultural tradition in its policy and stimulate the use of this tradition in society, thus nationalizing it. In contrast, the 'centrists' preferred an ethnoculturally ambiguous state whose degree of Ukrainianness would be determined by the imperatives of the legitimization of the regime and the preservation of social stability.

When the former nomenklatura agreed to proclaim Ukraine's full independence, it supported the institutionalization of several key elements of the Ukrainian ethnocultural tradition as understood by the 'national democrats'. Thus, symbols long presented in the nationalist discourse as *the* national symbols of the Ukrainian people were chosen as the symbols of the new state. A historical scheme tracing the Ukrainian people's distinctiveness and continuity since the time of Kyivan Rus was introduced in history textbooks, as well as state awards and banknotes. Moreover, the central place of the titular group in society was fixed in the 1996 Constitution and laws dealing with ethno-political issues, which were patterned on the nation-state norm (Kulyk 1999; Wolczuk 2001). The state's protection of the Ukrainian ethnic nation was also institutionalized in the support for diaspora organizations. Notwithstanding the favourable attitude towards cultural activities of the minorities, the post-Soviet regime retained the Soviet priority of state support for the culture of the titular nation, which under the new conditions could be implemented without the ambivalence formerly imposed by the Russian Union-wide primacy. The official discourse did not seek to justify these moves; they were taken for granted, assumed to be normal behaviour for a Ukrainian state, whose ethnocultural priorities were thus presupposed to be at least partially determined by those of its titular core.

However, the 'centrists' did not want to extend this unspecified normality as far as making the ethnic Ukrainian tradition the sole foundation for the state policies in relevant fields. On the one hand, they preferred not to run the risk of alienating those parts of the population favouring different traditions. On the other, the cultural self-expression of the Ukrainians and other groups was not for them a value in itself; it only mattered to the extent that it affected the realization of the imperatives of state-building and social stability. The authorities failed to consistently implement ethnic Ukrainian priorities even in such symbolically charged practices as the state calendar, public monuments and street names (Wolczuk 2000). Further, the

regime did not seek to consistently implement its declared orientations in various social fields and all regions of the country. Thus, a version of history presented in the media most of which, although formally independent, were controlled by the executive and carried its 'centrist' ideology, often ran counter to the version imposed in education; many 'centrist' media also showed greater support for the Russian culture than for the Ukrainian one (see below). In the predominantly Russophone regions, even the authorities often favoured the Soviet and Russian tradition, arguably in accordance with the local majority's preferences.

The inconsistency of ethnocultural policy and its instrumental use in the regime's consolidation were particularly notable under Kuchma who did not share his predecessor's hopes for a state-building role of the 'national revival'. In his inaugural speech of 1994, he justified his intention of putting an end to Kravchuk's unequivocal preference for the ethnic Ukrainian tradition by arguing that Ukraine was a 'multinational' state (Persha sesiiia 1994, p. 15). This thesis, which was extensively employed by the 'centrists' in the following years, did not, however, mean a call for the pluralization of the state's cultural basis by incorporating the minority traditions. Rather, it was the reversion to the Soviet normality prioritizing 'internationalist' uniformity and social pragmatism over ethnocultural traditions and ideals. It was this normality that the 'centrist' discourse presupposed and reproduced. On the one hand, this orientation entailed the marginalization of ethnicity as an element of individual identity and a factor in social life. Not surprisingly, its presence in public discourse radically diminished during the Kuchma years, thus reversing the processes of the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Soviet citizens, under the influence of the public re-examination of the nationality problem, had 'discovered' its utmost importance. On the other hand, the Russian culture and East Slavic (often Russocentric) tradition were again, as in the Soviet era, assumed to be an integral part of cultural identity of all citizens, at least no less than the Ukrainian culture and tradition were. Together with the naturalization of the role of Russian as one of the two languages of the country (see below), mainstream discourse and practice based on this assumption virtually unmade the legislative framework considering the Russians a minority like any other. Moreover, they undermined the reification of the 'Russian-speaking population' as a distinct social group whose interests required the continuous presence of Russian language and culture in Ukraine; this came to be perceived as imperative and natural in view of the preferences of all (or the bulk of) the population.⁹

In the language field, similarly, the 'centrists' did not question the orientation towards a leading role of Ukrainian as both a constitutionally fixed reality and a normal practice for a Ukrainian state. This

orientation was confirmed and specified in a number of executive decrees and largely implemented in various state-controlled practices, both under Kravchuk and under Kuchma. At the same time, the Ukrainianization of public sphere was far from consistent and all-embracing. The public use of Russian, far from being demoted to the level of a minority language, remained virtually unchanged or even increased in a number of practices. Similarly to the ethnocultural policies, regional patterns of language use varied greatly, Russian remaining overwhelmingly dominant in the east and south. However, in contrast to the 'national-democratic' discourse, the 'centrist' one considered the widespread use of Russian to be as normal as the legal and symbolic primacy of Ukrainian.

Let us consider each of the two aspects of the 'centrist' normalization in some detail. The first pertains to the role of the Ukrainian language and the scope of use it entails. Since the early years of independence, in order to justify and naturalize the role of Ukrainian as the virtually sole public language, in accordance with the nation-state norm, the 'national democrats' preferred to refer to it as 'the state language' which was to mean not just the language of the state but *the* language of the country. The mixture of ethnocultural and territorial meanings of the term 'Ukrainian' pointed to above was an important element of the normalization of the exclusive role of Ukrainian, which would de-legitimize the question of why it should be the only state language, while not being the language of the overwhelming majority of the citizens. In questioning this normality, the leftist and Russian nationalist discourses argued that the state should grant effectively equal statuses to Ukrainian and Russian as the languages of preference of roughly equal parts of its citizens. The opponents of such bilingualism were convinced that it would mean the preservation of the dominance of Russian rather than equal rights for speakers of the two languages (Kulyk 2004).

Seeking to normalize the regime's policy and marginalize the criticism on both sides, the 'centrist' discourse took for granted the exclusive status of Ukrainian as the state language but treated it as having to do with the state's interests rather than the citizens' rights. This contributed to the de-legitimization of attempts to question the existing statuses of the minority languages as infringing on the rights of their speakers. At the same time, the Ukrainophones' attempts to assert their rights based on the declared status of Ukrainian appeared to be no more legitimate, all the more so because the very notion of Ukrainian as a language of a group submerged under the references to the state language. The distinction between the roles of Ukrainian as the language of the country, the state and the titular group was never recognized in the 'centrist' discourse nor, accordingly, were the scopes of use appropriate for each designation discussed. The limits of the

legitimate use of that, or any other, language were not specified, hence the transgressions by the officials or citizens could hardly be brought to the fore. A relevant article in the Constitution stipulated the state's obligations both to ensure the 'comprehensive development and functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life throughout the entire territory of Ukraine' and the 'free development, use and protection of Russian, and other languages of national minorities' (Constitution 1996, art. 10), whose less than full compatibility the 'centrist' discourse never recognized either.¹⁰ Moreover, the language law of 1989 was nearly unanimously believed to be outdated and ineffective, but the authorities failed to make a resolute effort to get a new law adopted. The lawlessness of the language domain was rarely mentioned, hence implicitly perceived as normal. The 'centrists' usually argued that language was not a problem for society; to the extent it was, it was to be dealt with by means of the administrative effort of the executive, rather than in the courts where the citizens would defend their rights.

Another aspect of the normalization had to do with the use of Russian within a scope incomparable with those of other languages having the same status, and sometimes even broader than the scope of the state language. While seeking to introduce Ukrainian as the primary language of the *state*, the 'centrists' readily accepted that *society* kept speaking other languages as well, first and foremost Russian. Actually, society was even presupposed to prefer Russian to Ukrainian as a language of interethnic communication and many other practices, a reality which, the 'centrists' believed, should be taken into account in policy-making. The 'centrist' discourse did not recognize that in some fields such as education the state did seek to change the language preferences of society; nor was this effort juxtaposed with the developments in many other domains that reinforced the greater acceptability of Russian, most notably the media (see below). Accordingly, the possible state policy was (usually implicitly) dichotomized in this discourse as either the forceful imposition of Ukrainian or the acceptance of Russian as one of the two languages of the country, which made the reasonable choice predetermined.

Instead of the temporary acceptability it enjoyed under Kravchuk, Kuchma wanted the Russian language to regain permanent legitimacy. In his inauguration speech of 1994, he justified his intention to upgrade the status of Russian by arguing that Ukraine should be 'a mother for all its citizens, regardless of their nationality, denomination, [and] the language they consider their mother tongue' (Persha sesiiia 1994, p. 16). This argument reverted to Soviet common sense reducing the formal equality of *all* languages to equal rights of *two* of them. The president and other 'centrists' sought to reinstall/preserve

this common sense long after they had given up their attempts to fix it by means of legal bilingualism. In the late 1990s, Kuchma came to repeatedly combine in his statements the formulae 'we have only one state language' and 'the Russian language should not feel itself foreign in Ukraine' (e.g. Podrobnosti 2001). The very fact of the combination (rather than addressing each formula to an audience favouring it) revealed his assumption that most Ukrainian citizens perceive the two orientations as quite compatible; needless to say, the unproblematic coexistence of the two premises in the 'centrist' discourse also facilitated this perception. At the same time, the argument for the legitimacy of the presence of the Russian language in society, as opposed to the Ukrainian monolingualism, testified to the view that Russian was the *only* language other than Ukrainian which should not be foreign. This meant, in effect, the normalization both of a more-than-minority status of Russian and the virtual exclusion of 'true' minority languages from the public sphere. If the 'centrists' were ready to recognize the dominance of Russian in Ukrainian society as abnormal, it was only to the extent that its use greatly exceeded that of *Ukrainian*, which thus appeared in a clearly unfavourable position.

The fact that the 'national-democratic' discourse, too, mostly viewed the functioning of Russian in comparison with that of Ukrainian rather than other minority languages, is but one illustration of its immersion in the 'centrist' common sense. Unable to ignore the normality being imposed by the regime, the 'national democrats' increasingly accepted the role of Russian as one of the two languages of the country and were preoccupied with ensuring their equality in those practices where Ukrainian had been marginalized rather than with the nation-state dominance of the latter. Moreover, in order to avoid being portrayed as radicals capable of causing an interethnic conflict, the 'national-democratic' parties largely gave up their emphasis on the language problem. It was vividly demonstrated by a campaign of Our Ukraine block embracing most of these parties in the parliamentary election of 2002, as well as a presidential campaign of its leader Viktor Yushchenko in 2004. Although this strategy may be justified from the point of view of electoral success, it facilitates the naturalization of the 'centrist' ideology to which mass consciousness thus sees no viable alternatives.

The role of the media

The media has played a key role in the process of the naturalization of the 'centrist' ideology in general and its ethnolinguistic elements in particular. Due to the concentration of the media outlets in the hands of those elites holding 'centrist' views and the regime's effort to suppress any challenge to its domination, other ideologies have been

marginalized in the Ukrainian media discourse. Given the unique place of the media in contemporary societies, this has heavily contributed to the 'centrist' dominance in public discourse as a whole.

In the first years of independence, although the transition to the market economy and the impoverishment of potential consumers made it difficult for most outlets to survive, the lack of systematic interference on the part of the authorities created preconditions for an increased social role of the media and ideological diversity within the field. While most of the state-owned media adhered to the official ideology of state-building, many outlets controlled by various associations or private individuals articulated their respective ideological preferences and criticized the Kravchuk regime's orientation and performance. The situation dramatically changed during Kuchma's presidency. On the one hand, most media were privatized or became dependent for their survival on the financial support of the parties or businesses which then used them to fight with political and economic enemies (Dyczok 2003). On the other, in the late 1990s the executive started systematically pressuring the media and those businesses financing them in order to ensure the unequivocal approval of its policies and exclude any support for the opposition. This resulted in the increasingly biased presentation of political and social processes, with lack of virtually any criticism of the regime and of virtually any positive or even neutral references to the opposition (Riabchuk 2001).

Accordingly, the Ukrainian media became increasingly 'centrist'. As argued above, the Kuchma regime sought to present itself as a moderate and constructive alternative to the allegedly extremist and dangerous communists and nationalists. The media discourse was the primary site of contrasting these two forces deemed to espouse the intrinsically dividing ideologies with the executive and its allies presented as pursuing the generally accepted goals of stability and well-being. Given the citizens' obviously low support for the regime, the 'centrist' media did not so much seek to convince them of its morality or effectiveness as to imply that, on the one hand, the opposition is no better and, on the other, the authorities in other countries are also more preoccupied with their own problems than with those of the population (Kulyk 2001b; Riabchuk 2001). Therefore, the overt approval of the regime policy and the refutation of the opposition's criticism were not featured in the 'centrist' media, all the more so because most of them were entertainment-oriented. Rather, the 'centrist' discourse implicitly legitimized the regime and marginalized its resolute opponents first and foremost by featuring everyday life free of public ideals and political engagement and by portraying any politics as a dirty zero-sum game. It assumed and, at the same time, created a world in which the usual was the (only) normal,

differences in identities and views did not matter, and radical changes were neither possible nor desirable (Dubin and Kulyk 2003).

As far as ethnolinguistic problems are concerned, the normality imposed by the media was largely based on the combination of the two themes analysed above, namely the primacy of the Ukrainian ethnocultural tradition and the legitimacy of both Ukrainian and Russian languages and cultures. The combination of the two assumptions was primarily normalized by means of the positive presentation of each of them without mentioning its relation to the other. Sometimes the compatibility of the two principles was discussed in newspaper opinion articles or TV talk shows, but the genres enabling a discussion between the supporters of different views or a critical analysis thereof were rare in the entertainment-oriented media. In most cases, the respective assumptions were not explicitly articulated in media products but were intended to be filled in by the consumers in order to render them meaningful. Thus, when the media reported on a new book by a prominent Ukrainian writer or the authorities' effort to ensure that classic Ukrainian paintings were duly kept in a national arts museum, their audiences were to take it for granted, among other things, that the Ukrainian culture is both a legitimate object of the state's concern and of the Ukrainian population's interest, much more so than the cultures of the minorities which were rarely mentioned in the news. Similarly, the reports on the publication of a new Harry Potter book translated into Ukrainian, rather than Russian or any other language, confirmed the status of the former as *the* language of the country, while the texts on Ukrainian diaspora contributed to the view of the Ukrainian people as based on origin and culture and encompassing individuals all over the world. Those pieces focusing on problems, such as a lack of the state's support for the Ukrainians abroad or the dominance of Russian in the cinema, supplemented the (re)construction of this normality by pointing to its alleged violations.

However, the normality of the primary role of the Ukrainian language and culture was undermined by other, no less routine media practices which diminished its prominence and/or implanted the view that the presence of the Russian language and culture in Ukrainian society is also normal. It is this aspect that makes the (re)production of nationhood in the Ukrainian media different from the practices of established nation-states (Billig 1995). On the one hand, the ethnolinguistic dimension of a reported issue was often excluded from consideration, thus making it seem irrelevant and the prevailing patterns acceptable. For instance, the news of the opening of a computer class in a school or the problem of scarcity of such classes in the country were usually presented without mentioning the language of the computers' interface or referring to the problem of the lack

of the Ukrainian-interface computers in most of the social fields functioning in that language. Sometimes the fact of the use of Russian in a particular event or practice was mentioned but neither foregrounded nor explained, which reflected the view of its being normal. On the other hand, when the media reported on perceived violations of normality, the latter often appeared to provide for the equal currency of the two languages and cultures rather than the dominance of Ukrainian. In particular, the repeated discussions of the deplorable situation of book publishing or the cinema in Ukrainian referred to their inferior position with regard to their Russian-language counterparts, whose more-than-minority currency in Ukraine was thus assumed to be perfectly legitimate.

Perhaps in no other aspect was the prevalence of the normalization of the equality and interchangeability of Ukrainian and Russian over that of the unchallenged dominance of the former more obvious than in the language uses of the media themselves. In the early 1990s the gradual transition of most printed and electronic media to Ukrainian seemed inevitable; by the end of the decade Russian retained or even strengthened its prominence in the field in general and the primary role in many specific practices. The share of Ukrainian-language newspapers and magazines in the total circulation fell far below the percentage of (however defined) Ukrainian-speakers, and most new high-circulation outlets appeared in Russian. Virtually none of the TV or radio broadcasters conformed to the legal requirement regarding a minimal share of air time in the state language (Riabchuk 2001). While in the early years of independence the use of Russian in movies or music programmes was largely a legacy of the Soviet period, later it increasingly reflected the broadcaster's preferences or those of the audience as perceived and influenced by the former. Even though some products, first and foremost the news, were mostly broadcast in Ukrainian in bilingual outlets, the quoted speech in Russian was never translated, contrary to the pieces in other languages. All these facets of the presence of Russian imposed that language as understandable for all members of Ukrainian society and not only those considering it their native or preferable language. This contributed to the naturalization of the view of both languages as equally acceptable and, therefore, of society as inherently bilingual, not in the sense of consisting of two relatively homogenous parts, but rather of the two elements being present in every member's identity.

In addition to Ukraine's bilinguality, the common sense being constructed in media discourse included its belonging to a common cultural space with Russia. The Russian pop- and movie stars were more important newsmakers for Ukrainian tabloids than their

Western or even Ukrainian colleagues. The Russian talk shows and movies substituted for lacking Ukrainian analogues in the role of *domestic* products and thus contributed to the naturalization not only of language but also of an ideology running counter to the one supported by the state. The Russian-language movies produced in Ukraine since the early 2000s, often in cooperation with Russian companies, were presented as a national alternative to foreign production, 'our movies', and the media celebrating their appearance as an important media/cultural achievement did not even mention what language those movies used (e.g. Trymbach 2000). The notion of 'ours' appeared to be vague and inclusive enough to enable references to the common post-Soviet or East Slavic cultural space, as demonstrated by an announcement of a new Russian movie on the Soviet war against the Nazis in the 1+1 TV channel in May 2003 which presented it as 'our movie about our war'. In this case, as in many other media events, language was just one element in the discursive construction of a transnational commonality.

The enormous concentration of the Ukrainian media in the hands of the pro-presidential 'centrists' and the executive's effort to keep opposition ideas away from the mass audience resulted in the ever deeper immersion of media discourse in the 'centrist' common sense. Those few outlets retaining a critical attitude towards the doubtless priority of stability over democratic and cultural values failed to consistently realize this attitude in their discourse, particularly on ethnolinguistic issues. On the one hand, the presence of these issues in most of the 'non-centrist' outlets was decreasing and, more important, localized in those practices, such as opinion pages in the newspapers or talk shows on TV, which were separated from seemingly neutral genres by their overt ideological nature. On the other hand, these media were unable to resist the pressure of discursive practices facilitating the naturalization of the 'centrist' priorities. Thus, those events contributing to the dominance of Russian-language, popular music and cinema, such as concerts or releases of new albums or movies, were mostly treated as newsworthy facts or occasions for interviews with those singers or actors who were believed to be, and thus made, idols of the Ukrainian masses (Kulyk 2002). Even more natural looked the practice of publishing weekly schedules of upcoming TV programmes instead of (or, in rare cases, in addition to) critically discussing the channels' linguistic and cultural choices which not only reflected but also transformed popular preferences. By internalizing what they believed to be generally accepted practices in order to attract greater audiences, the potential challengers of the 'centrist' common sense helped to conceal the arbitrariness of those practices and, therefore, to naturalize the ideology they embody.

Conclusion

As announced in the introduction, I analysed public discourses and practices contributing to the transformation or preservation of the common-sense assumptions of the post-Soviet Ukrainian individual, while leaving it for future research to examine how he/she responds to these contributions. Therefore, my concluding statements regarding the evolution of those assumptions and its social ramifications will be speculative and preliminary, indicating probabilities rather than actualities. What encourages me to formulate them is the very degree of dominance of these discourses and practices, which makes it difficult for mass consciousness to avoid being penetrated by their ideological propositions presented as mere common sense.

Notwithstanding the unavoidable impact of a change of the state and the dominant ideology on Ukrainian citizens' common sense, an attempt to make it unequivocally 'national' failed, mostly due to an ambivalent attitude of the ruling elite. Not only were the post-nomenklatura authorities reluctant to fully implement the nationalizing project, but also their increasing preoccupation with suppressing or marginalizing the 'national-democratic' opposition paved the way for a hegemony of the regime's 'centrist', allegedly non-ideological mutation of that project. As a result, the ambiguity of ethnolinguistic assumptions which was inherited from the Soviet era remains an important factor of identity and social behaviour.

The beliefs on language use are particularly demonstrative in this regard. Although the perceived relevance and significance of Ukrainian in its capacities of the state language and, for most members of the titular group, native language have increased, the common sense being moulded by the Kuchma regime does not recognize its monopoly or even unequivocal priority in the public sphere. In effect, what it prescribes is bilingualism, with no clear boundaries between the respective domains of the Ukrainian and Russian languages. Therefore, Ukrainian may be ambivalently perceived as *both* the language of the country and one of the two languages, hardly the most significant for social interaction.

Further, ethnic feelings and relations that in the late Soviet years had come to be perceived as very important for social justice and stability have moved to the margins of mass consciousness during Kuchma's presidency. At the same time, the Russians/Russophones whom the 'national democrats' and, under their influence, Kravchuk, had tried to demote to a minority level, have reverted to being a part of the (not ethnically delineated) constituent core of Ukrainian society. Given that various practices impose the use and consumption of both Ukrainian and Russian languages and cultures as the most normal pattern, the society itself is assumed to be bilingual and bicultural not

in the sense that it consists of two relatively homogenous parts, but rather that every member combines the two elements in his/her identity and behaviour. However, this assumption coexists in mass consciousness with the belief that the Ukrainian culture and tradition constitute a core value of society, which is reproduced by many other practices.

In conclusion, I shall venture an assessment of the broader social consequences of the state policy with regard to language and ethnicity, viewed through the prism of its impact on the citizens' common sense. On the one hand, this ambiguous policy contributed to social stability and integration, as none of the main ethnolinguistic groups felt excluded or clearly discriminated against. Moreover, extreme solutions supposedly favouring one of these groups, such as unrestricted dominance of the Ukrainian language and culture or their formal equality with Russian, with the renouncement of any promotion of the former, have been largely marginalized both in political practice and common-sense assumptions. Therefore, radical changes in the official course seem improbable. As for more modest corrections of the relative weights of the 'nation-state' and 'bilingualism' components which do not aim at thoroughly de-legitimizing one of them, they would mostly be perceived as normal, hence not evoke any significant protest, even though they may have far-reaching consequences for mainstream practices and, as a result, popular beliefs. On the other hand, the combination in the mainstream discourse of highly contradictory ideological messages, including those questioning the very existence of a separate Ukrainian nation, contributed to social anomie and undermined the post-imperial emancipation. Even more important, that discourse discouraged the perception of ethnolinguistic matters in terms of human rights and adherence to the law, thus facilitating the consolidation of the undemocratic regime and the marginalization of attempts to resist its policies. The normalization of illegal behaviour by the state and the citizens will also impede future attempts to build a democracy by means of a transparent legal compromise between clearly articulated group interests. But then this pernicious impact of undemocratic stability on Ukrainian society is by no means limited to the domain of language and ethnicity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dominique Arel, Margarita Balmaceda, Laada Bilaniuk, Michael Billig, Norman Fairclough, David Laitin, Bo Petersson, Serhii Plokyh and Susan Stewart for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this article. Part of my work on the text was conducted when I stayed at University College London on a grant from the British Academy whose generous support is much appreciated, as is the help of my host Andrew Wilson.

Notes

1. Gramsci used the term ideology in a broad sense of a 'conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life' (1971, p. 328).
2. Fairclough (1989) speaks of the naturalization of discourse types arguing that an ideology comes to be perceived as common sense when the discourse type embodying it becomes naturalized, that is, seen as the only one possible. I prefer to speak of the naturalization of both discourse types and ideologies, in order to stress an equivalence between the perceived naturalness of a given way of speaking and a given way of 'seeing things'.
3. Prior to World War I, the territory of contemporary Ukraine was divided between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and in the inter-war period between the USSR, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia. During World War II, these lands were united within the Ukrainian SSR, except for the Crimean peninsula which was transferred from the Russian Federation to Ukraine in 1954.
4. An alternative provided, in the post-Stalin decades, by Western radio programmes and books, while influencing some important groups such as the intelligentsia, failed to reach the majority of the population. The dissident literature had an even more limited audience.
5. This is how Rukh and other moderate nationalist parties called themselves and were referred to in Ukrainian public discourse of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although most Western students reasonably classify them, together with self-declared nationalist parties, as nationalists, here I do not want to feature this classification, which coincides with the label attached to both kinds of actors by their opponents. As Billig (1995) has shown, imposing the view of the Other as 'nationalist' is a powerful means of making one's own nationalism invisible, and I intend to analyse the process of the imposition rather than uncritically accept its result. This choice of self-definition as an analytical 'lesser evil' will also be used to those calling themselves centrists (see below). In both cases, I will show my reluctance to internalize the definitions as analytical categories by putting them in quotation marks when referring to groups and their discourses.
6. As Slezkine (1996, p. 228) commented, '[a] civilized country, in other words, was an ethnonational state in which the official language was by definition "native". The stalinist nationality policy had obviously borne fruit'.
7. Although Halliday referred primarily to languages of the criminal world or social groups which came to position themselves as 'anti-societies', his notion can also be applied to any discourse viewed by its participants as a conscious alternative to the dominant language.
8. This was reflected, in particular, in the regime's preference for the term 'nationalist' over 'national-democrats', the former still evoking rather negative feelings among post-Soviet Ukrainians. Similarly, the 'national-democratic' discourse called self-declared centrists 'pro-presidential' or 'oligarchic' forces.
9. The concept of the Russian-speaking population in the post-Soviet states encompassing all citizens who prefer Russian in their everyday life, regardless of their ethnic identification, seems to have entered Ukrainian public discourse through the Russian media and political statements regarding their alleged discrimination. The term was for some time widely used in political and media discourse, but now its presence seems to be decreasing.
10. While the presence of the two above formulae in the Constitution itself resulted from a compromise between the Communists and the 'national-democrats' pushing for the respective orientations (Wolczuk 2001), their active use in official discourse afterwards reflected first and foremost the regime's striving for the neutralization of criticism from both sides.

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VOLODYMYR KULYK is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

ADDRESS: 15 Dobrokhotova Street, Apt. 116, Kyiv 03142, Ukraine.

Email: <v_kulyk@hotmail.com>