

## Language and Identity in Ukraine: Was it Really Nation-Building?

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### Abstract

After the collapse of three socialist federations in Eastern Europe, the expression 'nation-building' returned to the heart of academic debates. Like other former socialist republics, Ukraine has started its nation-building project trying to balance between a limitation of centrifugal forces and the 'nationalisation' (Brubaker 1994) of the state. This article examines the main features of language policies within the Ukrainian nation-building project and adopts a dual approach. It first surveys the political will that has been incarnated in language policies since 1991, and how national identity has been affected by those policies. However, it counterpoises this approach with an analysis of bottom actors and their attitude towards language policies. The framework constructed is intended to question the idea that nation-building is mainly an elite driven process and to suggest that common people can participate in a political project by renegotiating its features at the local level.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, nationalism, nation-building, language, identity.

### Introduction

After the collapse of three major federations in Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia, the USSR and Czechoslovakia) the term 'nation-building', coined at the beginning of the 1960s, returned to the heart of academic and political debates for at least two reasons. First, a number of newly independent or newly formed states proved to be incapable of limiting ethnic competition, clashes and in some cases war (the most notorious case is possibly Bosnia Herzegovina, but ethnic clashes were recorded also in many former Soviet republics); second, a tendency towards the 'nationalising of the state' (Brubaker 1996a) was noticed in Eastern Europe and in some cases attracted international criticism (like in the case of citizenship laws in Estonia and Latvia). The result was an extremely lively debate that rediscovered Hans Kohn's classification of ethnic and civic nations (1944) with scholars using 'nation-building', referring to a wide and diverse range of policies: from state consolidation to identity policies, to democratisation efforts.

In Ukraine, the front-runner of this debate was Taras Kuzio who, when questioning Brubaker (1996a, 1996b), argued that the risk of nationalising the state could be avoided by proposing a civic nation-building project, and that Ukraine could provide empirical evidence to back his claim (Kuzio 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2005). Such an approach paved the way to a very lively debate on the civic and ethnic nature of the Ukrainian nation-building project (Barrington 1995, Janmaat 2000, Latin 1998, Schulman 1999, 2002, 2003, Wolczuk 2000), in addition to the already existing debate on nation-building and identity formation. This article is situated in the above-mentioned debate, but it is also distinguished by two main interpretative frameworks. The first one is to survey the literature on nation-building and show that it has been used with very diverse meanings since its conceptualisation (Deutsch & Folz 1963). The second is to refer to the identity formation aspect of a nation-building

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project and provide a working definition of the term that acknowledges the role different segments of a society play in a nation-building project. This concerns rests on the fact that what is possibly the best definition of nation-building, 'to match the nation with the state' (Connor 2004), is often interpreted in a way implying that it is mainly a top-down political process, neglecting the role of bottom (or mid) actors in the political process. In this respect, this article is intended to challenge the approach that in a nation-building project elite-driven policies will be understood and abided at all levels of the society. Empirical research has shown that even the best instructions from the top might be misunderstood, or only partially understood (Morrison 2008), opposed or renegotiated. Already starting with Scott (1985), anthropologists have illustrated the way a renegotiation of economic policies happens at the everyday level and further research has suggested that this can be extended to identity and linguistic policies (Kalev & Ruutsoo 2009, Kulyk 2011, Polese & Wylegala 2008, Polese 2010, Rodgers 2006, 2007, Kuurusvall, Vetik & Berry 2009).

This article might be seen as continuing an exploration of the involvement of people in the construction of a national identity proposed by Billig (1994). However, in contrast to Billig's approach, I assume that people can not only participate in the construction of a national identity, but they are also part of its renegotiation (be this formal or informal). What happens if the 'banal' symbols or markers of our national identity are not acceptable for us? This article starts with this question to suggest that rejecting some identity markers does not necessarily entail a rejection of that very identity.

The case study presented in the rest of the article explores the nation-building put forward by the Ukrainian elites and, in particular, the proposition of the Ukrainian language as an identity marker. However, in contrast with elite-centred analyses of nation-building projects, this article explores to what extent the acceptance of the Ukrainian language as an identity marker depends on the choices made by the political elite, and to what extent is it the result of the people's agency and renegotiation of such a measure in what I have defined elsewhere as 'spontaneous nation-building' (Polese 2009). In this respect, this article is inspired by a question on the "production of the political" Navarro-Yashin (2002) asks: are those categories, which claim to represent the state, the only ones entitled to represent it? In the Ukrainian case, are those categories that claim to regulate the political life of a country the only ones affecting the political developments of a country? The answer this article gives is that there are other actors, who participate in the political life of a country, but are nonetheless ignored unless they hit the headlines. The fact that common people participate in the production of the political means that they deserve more attention even from political research as even the absence of contentious politics in a country does not exclude the possibility that bottom actors may influence policies by simply not complying with some state rules or instructions. Finally, because we are in the social sciences, it would be important to avoid categorisations suggesting that people either comply or not with a policy. People might partially comply or comply only in certain time frames; instructions given by a state are complex and consist of several points, some of which might be accepted and some others might not. The first part of this article will survey the existing literature on nation-building to pinpoint four main different understandings of the term. The second and third parts present a case study of the linguistic policies in Ukraine as an instrument of nation-building. Following Herzfeld's methodology (2005), the article combines top-down and bottom-up approaches by comparing the way Ukrainian national identity has been put forward through linguistic policies through the way citizens have learned to live it, accepting some aspects and rejecting others. Methodologically, this article is informed by participant observations in key points (schools, universities, cultural centres) resulting from several long stays in Ukraine over the period of 2002-2008 and complemented by informal and 49 semi-structured interviews with 3 generations of Ukrainians (to understand the different attitudes of different generations).

## One, two, three... how many 'nation-buildings'?

The book that gave the term 'nation-building' widespread use bears the homonym title *Nation-building* and was edited by Karl Deutsch and William Folz (1963). The term had been used before (Ade 1961, Pye 1962), but the book had the merit of framing it in a wider geographical picture and engaging with a systematic debate comparing nation-building in Europe, the US and the newly independent states in the rest of the world. In spite of criticism of the way in which the word 'nation' was used (Connor 1972, 1978) and further arguments that to build a nation one needs to destroy a number of others (Connor 1972, Laitin 1977), the book opened the way to widespread debate on the meanings of the term nation-building. It also launched the debate on what could be the measures allowing a state to overcome ethnic differences and inculcate into people a sense of belonging to an overarching community. The main idea of the book was that modernisation would level ethnic identities and allow consolidation of civic states, taking as a model those civic Western states consolidated in the XIX and XX centuries (Deutsch 1954, see also Deutsch & Foltz 1963).

One of the main critiques that the book received was that modernisation seemed to have increased ethnic conflicts in the world, rather than decreasing them (Connor 1972). Notwithstanding this, the idea of a project of political engineering uniting a population thanks to the right policies fascinated social scientists ever since. As a result, besides the mainstream studying nation-building in developing countries, a new generation of social scientists started investigating the nature of the nation and concentrated on the nation-building processes in the formation of nation-states since the XVII century. The study of nation-building evolved together with the study of nationalism, and authors from sociology, history and cognate disciplines got interested in the creation of a 'nation', although the civic and ethnic conceptions of a nation started being confused (see the debate in Connor 2004).

Scholars looked at apparently successful cases of national identity consolidation and sought a theoretical model that would allow repeating those successes in new states. The genesis of a nation is until now still one of the most debated issues: modernists see it as a result of modernity, perennialists say it has been there for a long time and primordialists see its germ in the blood ties of tribes in ancient times. However, it might be possible to agree to a certain extent that, regardless of the origins of the nation, the process of spreading of a national identity could only happen when the idea of nation was conceptualised, and a national identity could be passed to an entire population. If we see this as a process of inculcation of a national identity to a whole population living on the same administered territory, it becomes possible to describe the formation of nation-states as nation-building. Despite the fact that this process had its own obstacles, such as separatist movements, renegotiation of frontiers, irredentism, it happened relatively smoothly compared with what 'nation-builders' faced in the second half of the XX century.

Inculcation of a national identity in those states that would be taken as examples happened in completely different conditions. The first difference is that national identities were not necessarily formed. The further we go into the past, the rarer it may be to find a sense of national identity spread to the peasantry. National elites, once in power, could work on something similar to a tabula rasa and inculcate a sense of national identity without having to convert people, or at least not having to compete with any strong boundaries. Nation identity could be proposed, at least in some cases, as complementary rather than in competition with local identities. As an example, one can consider Eugene Weber's work (1976) on the formation of a national identity among French peasantry, suggesting that a widespread national idea came into force only in the late XIX century. This allegedly came as the result of a political process started a century earlier through school (Chanet 1996), linguistic (de Certeau et al 1975) and other regional policies that were helped by the idea that integration into a national community would increase welfare of certain groups (Hobsbawm & Terence 1983, Hobsbawm 1989, 1990, Gellner 1983). This means that political elites could play with overlapping identities, and there was no need to eradicate or 'erase' local ones. It would be sufficient to construct a national

idea as complementary, rather than in competition, to a local one. Acceptance of an overarching identity could be seen as the price to pay to access the means that would allow an individual to find a place in a society (De Certeau et al. 1975). However, this was done at the expense of local cultures and languages (Van Gennep 1991 [1921]), and meant switching the focus from *les petites patries* to *la Grande Patrie* (Chanet 1996). That meant, in turn, the abandon of what the Abbé Grégoire calls the condition of cultural degradation (De Certeau et al. 1975) at a moment when national identity was still in formation (Weber 1976) and, thus, easier to manipulate.

Second, even when some segments of the population did not agree with the project of nation-building, there were fewer concerns than nowadays and, with the Council of Europe still to be conceived, assimilation was less of an issue than today. Small nations were allegedly opposing a social and political project granting the same rights to everyone in a country. As a result, they were considered a hindrance to the social and economic development of 'big nations' (MacLaughlin 1991). When it comes to defending national identity, the 'noble' nationalist project of big nations, aimed at permitting access to economic and social benefits, was far more important than the 'mean' nationalistic projects of small nations that opposed national standardisation and, thus, were dangerous for modernisation (Franzinetti 1995).

The ethno-symbolist approach tried to question the elite-centred version of nation-building (Smith 1991). In addition, the debate was enhanced by the end of the communist ideology in Eastern Europe and the collapse of three major European federations. While witnessing civil unrest or even war in some new republics, scholars started working on the question of how the resulting states would survive, given that in most cases the new republics were ethnically mixed. Nation-building seemed to be the answer; it would be a way to create a national idea for all the groups inhabiting the same state. As a result, scholars started debating over what measures were the best or worst to adopt and to assess the policies of each state. However, aware of the previous flaws in theory, scholars quickly turned to the distinction between an ethnic and a civic nation to suggest that some nation-building projects (based on ethnic principles) were more dangerous than others. Ethnic nation-building could be considered a project that tries to propose a national identity based on blood, descent, and other tangible elements so that those not bearing the criteria would be excluded from the process. Civic nation-building, in contrast, would try to construct a nation around some values, according to the principle that acceptance of some values is enough to be considered part of a nation, thus, proposing an inclusive interpretation of national identity.

This distinction between ethnic and civic nation-building has two main weak points. One is whether civic nation-building exists in practice since all measures targeting a whole population will be ethnic to a certain extent (Polese 2008). Even a very liberal measure, such as limiting the use of the national language to public spaces, prompts the question of where the public ends and the private begins; or, in case a country allows regions with substantial minorities to use their minority language, it is unclear how big a minority should be in order for their language to be acknowledged as the local one (and where would the civic dimension be for those who do not belong to that minority but inhabit that region, city or area?). The second is that the formation of a nation is not a moment but a process. It is, therefore, unclear when the formation of civic nation-states will be completed, how many people who feel that they are members of the same national community are needed to classify a state as a nation-state (Connor 2004), and what will happen to those excluded once the nation has been built?

Whilst the debate on nation-building continued, events in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the subsequent intervention of international forces, prompted a name to label the democratisation efforts of foreign powers applied to domestic policies, and the choice fell on nation-building. In 2004, Francis Fukuyama edited a book called: *Nation-building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*. The book suggests that nation-building is a series of efforts by foreign powers to promote institution-building and boost democratic consolidation in weak states. Some other books followed and contributed to the terminological confusion that sees nation-building used in many and different contexts.

**Table 1:** Four definitions of nation-building

Years	Geographical focus	Ideological approach
1960s	New states of Asia and Africa	Modernity will erase ethnic boundaries and civic values will avoid conflicts
End of the 70s, beginning of the 80s	Western Europe and US	Desire to create even access to resources and economic welfare that leads to the conception of a nation-state
90s	Former USSR and Balkans	Ethnic boundaries are dangerous. Engagement with civic values will allow consolidation of a political community
After 2001	post-conflict countries (such as Afghanistan or Iraq)	If a state is unable to take care of itself, foreign powers must have a primary role in promoting democracy

Source: author's compilation

There are at least four distinct moments in history and four interpretations of the term nation-building that leave little room for an agreement. The main characteristics of each definition are shown in the table below, but there is little doubt that nation-building has come to mean many and very different things since its conceptualisation.

A working definition of nation-building that could synthesise the above-mentioned approaches could be: nation-building is the action of a political actor (or actors), to convince people living on a same administrative territory (state) that they are part of a same community. Such definition leaves many doors open. It allows considering those belonging to the same community as having acquired either the same national or political identity and, therefore, seems acceptable. However, the definition fails to question an aspect that many take for granted. Is nation-building only an elite driven process? There seems to be an agreement on the fact that once the elite gives some instructions, the local population will respond positively. When opposition to nation-building policies makes headlines, it is possible to study the resulting consequences, whether these are separatists attempts or simply contentious politics challenging the elites. But there is little research that explores the possibility that a population, or a group of people, might not agree (to a different extent) with the instructions imparted by a state and decides to ‘boycott’ or oppose them, partially or totally. In this respect, this article continues the idea that policies may be renegotiated informally at the national but also at the local level (Fournier 2002, Pirie 1996, Polese, 2010, Rodgers 2007). Nation-building is, therefore, not only the policies adopted at the national level, but also the way people react to them. Such an approach would acknowledge the role of the people in the production of the political and see the role of human agency as crucial in the definition of a nation-building project. To be able to appreciate such a two-fold approach, the next section will give an overview on nation-building policies as conceived by top actors (mainly the parliament) in Ukraine, and the following ones will illustrate the way common people have tended to respond to them, not officially but informally.

**Nation-building and linguistic policies in Ukraine**

Although 90 percent of Ukrainians officially voted for independence in 1991, the Ukrainian language and identity were in an uneasy situation. The use of Ukrainian had been alternatively forbidden or limited during Russian domination, and then in the USSR (Kravchenko 1985). It was only during the perestroika period that Ukrainian started gaining political importance and was eventually upgraded

**Table 2:** Results of the 1989 and 2001 census – national composition.

	2001	1989
Ukrainian	77,8	72,7
Russian	17,3	22,1
Belorussian	0,6	0,9
Moldovan	0,5	0,6
Crimean Tatar	0,5	0,0
Bulgarian	0,4	0,5
Hungarians	0,3	0,4
Romanians	0,3	0,3
Poles	0,3	0,4
Jews	0,2	0,9
Armenians	0,2	0,1
Greeks	0,2	0,2
Tatars	0,2	0,2
Gypsies	0,1	0,1
Azerbaijanis	0,1	0,0
Georgians	0,1	0,0
Germans	0,1	0,1
Gagauzians	0,1	0,1
Others	0,4	0,4

Source : <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua>

**Table 3:** Language spoken by the two main national groups

Ukrainians	85.2% (Ukrainian speakers)	14.8% (Russian speakers)	0
Russians	95.9% (Russian speakers)	3.9% (Ukrainian speakers)	0.2% (speak another language)

Source: 2001 census, <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/>

in 1989 to the status of national language. Notwithstanding this, a number of politicians were still concerned about Ukrainian becoming extinguished (Arel 1994). This concern was used by the first President Leonid Kravchuk to gain political consensus, guarantee his own political survival (Kuzio 1997), and bring Ukraine to independence in 1991. The country, however, was in a relatively uneasy situation, given not only the amount of Russians living in the country, but also the amount of Russian speakers that could oppose a Ukrainisation project. To reduce the risk of ethnic tensions, it was decided that all Soviet citizens living in Ukraine at the time it became independent could receive Ukrainian citizenship regardless of their language or ethnic origins.

Institution-building was relatively easy, being able to count on the UkrSSR ones (Kuzio 1998, Whitmore 2005) whilst nation building became a priority – at least in theory – of most political parties (see Shevel 2004); though what nation-building meant could vary from party to party. Since independence, President Kravchuk had highlighted the role of the Ukrainian language in politics and identity construction. A few months before the 1994 elections, President Kravchuk introduced a law that obliged the Ukrainian president to know Ukrainian, which turned out to have long term effects. Not only did Leonid Kuchma, the main candidate to presidency and winner of the 1994 elections, start learning Ukrainian during the presidential campaign, he also continued speaking Ukrainian (or something he considered to be Ukrainian) when appearing on TV or when addressing the country until the end of his political career in 2004.

Under attack for not giving Ukrainian enough importance, President Kuchma quickly realised that the language question was extremely delicate and, if wrongly handed, could negatively impact both his political survival (Kuzio 1997), or even the sustainability of the Ukrainian state (Janmaat & Piattoeva 2007). Therefore, he agreed to endorse Ukrainian as the sole state language in the 1996 constitution. Russian, spoken by almost half of the country (Khmelko 2004), was classified as a minority language, equated with languages such as Bulgarian or Moldovan.

The 2001 census seemed to confirm the tendency to Ukrainise the country, and a large number of Ukrainian passport holders were classified as ethnic Ukrainians or even Ukrainian speakers. This may be due to several reasons: some scholars have seen in the declaration of being Ukrainian speakers a political position supporting the building and sustainability of a Ukrainian state, regardless of what was their real native language (Shevel 2004). Some others have criticised the census methodology saying that, allegedly, the census automatically classified people as native speakers of their national group language if they were not present in the household at the moment of the interview and did not necessarily explain the difference between a Ukrainian citizen (all those born in Ukraine not holding another passport) and ethnic Ukrainians (Stebelsky 2009).

The Ukrainian language was also promoted to state language status by a law requiring all official documents to be written in Ukrainian and a law on education in 1998, after which schools were increasingly pressured to use Ukrainian as their language of instruction. Teaching was set in Ukrainian, with the possibility of having other languages of instruction in places where a national minority was present, and studying both Russian and Ukrainian was made compulsory. Although those adjustments seemed to be more theoretical than practical in the first years of independence (Arel 1995: 600), they paved the way to the spread of Ukrainian as the main language in the country, and things changed rapidly. 51 percent of preschools were in Ukrainian in 1991, but the figure had risen to 76 percent by 2000. Primary and secondary schools in Ukrainian were 49 percent in 1991-92, but became 70 percent in 2000/2001 (Russian ones were 29 percent) with figures higher than 50 percent all over the country. The exceptions were Odessa (47 percent), Zaporizhzhia (45 percent), Luhansk (17 percent) Donetsk (14 percent) and Crimea (0,8 percent) (UCEPS 2002: 5). By 2002-2003, it is estimated that 74 percent of students studied in Ukrainian and only 25 percent in Russian (Kuts 2004: 182). New types of schools (lyceums, gymnasiums or colleges, after which no exam was requested to enter a university) could be opened only if they accepted Ukrainian as the main language of instruction. In addition, schools whose language of instruction was Ukrainian were given priority in receiving new textbooks.

From 1997/98, Russian language and literature started fading massively from the curricula for state sponsored Ukrainian schools, teaching in Russian had been largely phased out and 'Ukrainian' or 'European' values had been introduced through textbooks and new curricula (see Janmaat 2005, Kuzio 2006, Popson 2001, Wolczuk 2000). A major innovation was the ideological commitment with Ukrainian being the language of Ukrainians. In the official discourse, but especially in schools, Ukrainian is labelled '*ridna mova*' that only partially corresponds to the English expression 'native language', since '*ridno*' (from *naroditi*, to be born) implies that Ukrainian is the language students were born with, a thing that shows clearly the desire to propose language as a strong marker of Ukrainian identity.

A further field showing the way Ukrainian language contributed to create a façade of 'Ukrainianess' are the media and broadcasting instructions. As soon as 1993, a law regulating the language for radio and television broadcasting was adopted. The intent was to limit the use of the Russian language to concrete moments of the day, giving Ukrainian a preferred status for national and regional broadcasting. The law was complemented by another one, adopted in 2005, obliging all national and inter-regional radio and TV channels to broadcast in Ukrainian. Tax cuts for publications in Ukrainian tried to counterbalance the Russian removal of taxes on the export of Russian language books. However, once tax cuts were suspended by the parliament, the number of Ukrainian language newspaper fell from 68 percent in 1990 to 35 percent in 2000, with books from 90 percent to 12 percent (Shulman 2005: 43). A further law ruled that foreign films, including Russian ones, when showed



in Ukraine, had to bear Ukrainian subtitles. TV shows and other kinds of programmes in Russian followed the same instructions, a fact that many criticised for being an additional financial burden in a country where the majority of the population understands Russian perfectly.

Language policies in Ukraine seem to point in a clear direction, suggesting Ukrainian language as a clear mark of a national identity. This adds to what has been observed about the proposition of national symbols, national holidays (for instance see Kuzio 1998), and the reconstruction of historical memory on the origin of the Ukrainian nation (see Janmaat 2000, Popson 2001, Wolczuk 2002) or collective experiences, such as the memory of the genocide and its remembrance. The empirical material provided in the next section switches the focus from the policies, symbols and memories proposed at the top level to their reception and renegotiation. The picture that emerges is that a partial lack of enforcement of laws or rules seems to prompt an easier acceptance of a Ukrainian identity even by those who might be unable to acknowledge all the identity markers proposed by the state.

## The wrong premises? Ukrainians and the Ukrainian language

Language policies in Ukraine seem well targeted and have prompted a conversion of the population to a Ukrainian identity. At least this is what could be deduced from the 2001 and 1989 results (Table 2). This section is intended to show the nation-building policies (especially linguistic) in Ukraine as only one side of the coin. The other side of the Ukrainian nation-building passes through informal renegotiations of political measures and their reinterpretation, a fact that makes a Ukrainian identity more acceptable to the citizens. If I have to be a Ukrainian native speaker to feel Ukrainian, I might have some problems with that. But if all that the state demands is that I declare myself a Ukrainian speaker, I might end up believing that. The starting point of this section is an independent study on national identity and language carried out by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology that shows results contrasting with the ones of the census and reckoning also with mixed identities (Russia and Ukrainian) and the use of a hybrid language (surzhyk, an exotic mix of Russian and Ukrainian) (Table 4 and 5).

**Table 4:** Ethnic structure of Ukraine in historical comparison

Identity	1994-1999	2001-2003
Only Ukrainian	59,8	62,9
Russian and Ukrainian	24,4	22,5
Only Russian	11,3	10,0
Other	4,5	4,6
Total	100	100

Source: Khmelko 2004

**Table 5:** Linguistic structure of Ukraine in a historical comparison

Linguistic groups	1991-1994	1995-1999	2000-2003
Ukrainian speaking Ukrainians	41,2	46,3	45,4
Russian speaking Ukrainians	32,6	28,2	30,9
Russian speaking Russians	19,7	17,0	16,5
Other	6,5	8,5	7,2
Total	100	100	100

Source: Khmelko 2004



The above results may suggest two things. One is that the political elites might be trying to show, numbers in hand, that a Ukrainian identity is more widespread than it is in reality. The other is that ethnic diversity does not exclude the possibility to feel Ukrainian and that the nation-building project in Ukraine might be more advanced than one might think. This article does not challenge the official narrative of the Ukrainian state that sees a Ukrainian identity as spreading throughout the country. Rather, it suggests that the dynamic of identity construction is more complex and the results we can see in official statistics and accounts may be caused by two compensating flaws in the system that balance one another. It is a similar situation to when, solving a mathematical problem, someone made two errors that, instead of compromising it, ultimately lead to the right result. The first flaw, in this case, is the lack of a rigid application of nation-building measures so that not all those policies adopted are properly enforced. The other is the lack of control over the 'feedback' received from the citizens (for instance, a final report from a school in Ukrainian will be accepted as evidence that Ukrainian was the language of instruction). Laws adopted might not necessarily be enforced, leaving room for negotiation of identity markers, as the following case studies will show.

### Case 1, schools

Schools, where new generations are moulded, are possibly the most controversial point of Ukrainian linguistic policies. Because the majority of schools are public, and they depend on state funding, they should be interested in showing compliance with government instructions in terms of language use, at least in theory. In practice, because regionalism in Ukraine still matters (Arel 2006), in some regions the majority of the population has Ukrainian as a first language, whereas others (the South and East) host a majority of Russian speakers. In a school in L'viv, it will be relatively common to find communication in Ukrainian, but what happens in other cities, when Ukrainian is neither the teachers' nor the pupils' first language?

An answer may be that there is a chance to negotiate those laws and instructions coming from the national parliament. Ukrainian as a school language means that all communication with the ministry of education, curricula, communication with external actors has to be done in Ukrainian. However, this still leaves a decent amount of discretion. If a parent comes to talk with the teacher and is not fluent in Ukrainian, or if a teacher feels more confident in Russian during school meetings or even during classes, the use of Russian is largely tolerated. This is allowed as long as school representatives in outside meetings are willing to express themselves in Ukrainian. During classes or conversations on school related issues, teachers might want to use Russian to be better understood by their pupils. However, as previous research has shown (Polese 2010), this might go as far as using Russian from the beginning to the end of a class. Textbooks should be in Ukrainian, but they are not always provided or may not be provided in time, so that when lacking their Russian 'equivalent' texts are used (and the Ministry of Education is not necessarily aware of the language used). Children in Russian-speaking areas use Russian most of the time and Ukrainian in schools, so sometimes they feel more confident answering in Russian to questions the teacher asks, unless they have read the answer in a Ukrainian textbook, in which case they might want to use Ukrainian (Polese 2010).

Ukrainian is used to construct a façade of 'Ukrainianess', with teachers and students engaged in a work of mediation between the official narrative of the state and the local needs. Renegotiation of identity boundaries, in some cases, prompts not to use the textbooks adopted by the Ministry or Education, even if officially nothing else but those textbooks are used. Often teachers integrate, or even replace, the information of official textbooks with their own knowledge, or information from other books or the internet (Polese 2010, Richardson 2008, Rodgers 2007). Ukrainian and Russian languages become, in many cases, markers between the 'official time', during which Ukrainian needs to be used, and the 'unofficial time', when Russian is allowed. The boundary between the two 'times'

is very fluid, just like in the case of the public and private life divide. When the administration staff of a school meets, and it turns out that they all prefer Russian, they might switch to Russian to communicate during 'official time', as long as the official documents resulting from the meeting are written in Ukrainian. During language classes, if the teacher understands that it will be hard for pupils to translate from French or English into Ukrainian, Russian will be allowed. The difficulty to control every single step of this process, and possibly the lack of desire to do so, is leaving room for the renegotiation of identity boundaries. As long as the official instructions of the state are respected, that is Ukrainian is used at every official occasion when a third party could be watching or listening, Ukrainians are relatively free to use the language they want.

## Case 2, broadcasting and media

Ukrainian is the main language for national and interregional broadcasting. This means that, excluding local channels targeting a limited audience, the great majority of Ukrainian TV and radio broadcasting is in Ukrainian. Notwithstanding this, a casual observer turning on the TV at a random time might experience a completely different scenario. There are a number of things one needs to consider. The first one is that there is a substantial amount of public willing to listen to broadcast in Russian and, if there is a demand, suppliers will be very happy to match it. A substantial number of newspapers are in Russian, and magazines follow a similar trend. However, the law on advertisement applies, so the main weekly magazines are in Russian but have ads in Ukrainian. In contrast with this, recently Russian language magazines directed to a cultivated public such as *Korrespondent* or *Fokus* have been sided by some Ukrainian language magazines such as *Tizhden* that are progressively gaining popularity. An interesting case is the Ukrainian *Playboy* that, although entirely in Russian, was distinct from its Russian counterpart (with a launch campaign in December 2005). This seemed to imply that readers, whilst preferring a publication in Russian, would not be satisfied with a simple importation of the one printed in Moscow. They wanted, at least according to marketing analysts, their own (Russian language) issue.

Laws are more specific, or simply better enforced, in TV and radio broadcasting, since they reach a wider public than the printed press. However, there are also several ways not to comply strictly with such rules. If there are national language broadcasting quotas (i.e. where a minimum percentage of the daily broadcast must be in a national language) one could have a 2-hour classical music broadcasting with a 2 minute introduction in the national language and this would count as national language broadcasting. Or broadcasts could be in Russian during the most popular hours and the national language could be left for night broadcasting (for more strategies see Ó Beacháin & Khevilan 2011). Ukrainian TV channels using solely, or mainly, Ukrainian run the risk of losing large shares of audience. If a channel is based in a Russian-speaking region and is compelled to use Ukrainian, most

**Table 6:** Main Ukrainian newspapers and circulation

Zeralo nedeli (1994)	Ukrainian and Russian	57, 000
Fakty i komentarii (1997)	Russian	761, 000
Den (1996)	Ukrainian and Russian	62, 000
Segodnya (1997)	Russian	849, 000
Ukrayina moloda (n/a)	Ukrainian	163, 000
Vechernye vesti (1999)	Russian	500, 000
Silski visti (1920)	Ukrainian	430, 000

Source: BBC 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4073375.stm>

locals might stop following it. Likewise, a national channel broadcasting in Ukrainian is aware that to fully accommodate a rule will cost audience share in some regions. In some cases, it is possible to sell broadcasting space to channels from Russia.

In some cases, channels simply have refused switching to Ukrainian and continued outlaw broadcasting until the government coerced them into changing the broadcasting language. This was the case of *Ukraina*, a channel based in the Donbas region. Subtitles have alleviated life for some channels that can now transmit in Russian with Ukrainian subtitles. It would not be possible, however, to radically switch languages overnight. Even Ukrainian programmes are not always in Ukrainian. When reporters interview common citizens (and will normally use Ukrainian to address people) some of them reply in Russian. The same might happen during a talk show, when some of the guests might prefer to use Russian, but the program will be deemed in Ukrainian as long as the *vidushii* or host speaks Ukrainian.

### Case 3, political languages

The language of the political discourse in Ukraine is Ukrainian, this is the impression one may get from monitoring parliament sessions, political debates, or attending of official openings and ceremonies. However, the observer willing to go beyond this will notice how much Russian is present in the country. The national language of political speeches is Ukrainian and even non-Ukrainian speakers, at official occasions, make an effort to speak Ukrainian (or something they believe is Ukrainian), when addressing the country on national events. However, when targeting a specific public, they might take the liberty to use Russian. This is the case of many politicians willing to gain support in regions where Russians are the majority. President Yanukovich's discourses in his native Donetsk are often in Russian, and even a Ukrainian speaker such as former president Yushchenko, when addressing eastern regions on national TV during the Orange Revolution in 2004, used Russian instead of Ukrainian in an attempt to convince them he was not anti-Russian.

Moving away from the national parliament, the use of Russian, even on official occasions, becomes more and more frequent. An informant from the Odessa city administration reported that:

*All internal communication happens in Russian in my office. As soon as there is a fax to be sent to Kiev, people start panicking and the hunt for Ukrainian speakers begins. They will be asked to translate the content of the fax and send it. Kiev will receive a fax from Odessa [Russian speaking city] in Ukrainian and will be positively surprised. The national language is Ukrainian and Odessa speaks Ukrainian. (Personal communication)*

Knowledge of Ukrainian is considered by many as a business card, something you show when you have to introduce yourself (for a job, to a new group of people, see Sovik 2006). All advertisements for high qualified jobs require knowledge of both Russian and Ukrainian (along with English, for international jobs) despite the fact that Russian is not a national language. Another informant reported:

*I use Ukrainian when I go to public officers because they respect you more. Even if my Ukrainian is not perfect, it is a general understanding that only high ranking people speak Ukrainian so when I use it people in the office take me for somebody more important than I am and serve me better. (Personal communication)*

During a conference in Kilye, Odessa oblast', the rector of the Odessa National University was invited to deliver a speech. He went on stage and addressed the public in Ukrainian, provoking discontent in a number of locals, who did not understand Ukrainian. He switched to Russian (that

was his native language) and, in a sort of apology, said: 'I am so used to deliver all the speeches in Ukrainian that I did not think you would not understand'.

In this situation, the official and the unofficial, formal and informal overlap. 'Nobody is a Ukrainian speaker here, but we all try to do our best,' a teacher once said to me. Such tensions are more visible in Russian-speaking regions than in the West of the country, but nobody is excluded. A recent law (2010) authorised people to defend themselves in a court in Russian, if they could prove that their Ukrainian is not sufficiently eloquent. Such a law simply acknowledged something that was already happening in many courts, where tongues get twisted, and the official language is a unique combination of legal Ukrainian terminology embedded in Russian sentences.

## Conclusions

In 1991, Ukraine has allegedly started a nation-building project largely based on language measures. Ukrainian language was considered, in the first stage, equal with Russian, and then the sole state language to develop and protect. Ukrainian is also possibly the most important identity boundary in the country, given that it is the most tangible one. As a result, language became possibly the most important issue in the Ukrainian nation-building project.

A nation-building project is certainly impacted by political elites. However, there are a number of actors that also have a word. Not only is the way policies are transmitted the result of the agency of intermediaries (local administrations and how much they understand the instructions) and of common people, who have the ultimate choice to accept, reject or renegotiate the instructions delivered to them. The success of a nation-building project also depends on a) the capacity of the elites to adopt the right measures, that is propose things that will not be difficult to comply with and will not request a radical change in people's life and b) on the desire and capacity, by common people, to oppose or accommodate such a project.

Ukrainian nation-building has several features that make it quite well-targeted. However, its application and applicability seems to contrast with the official version. Rules are not necessarily enforced, and there is no formal punishment for those not abiding by them. This may be seen as a failure of the elites, because they cannot make people respect the laws; but it may also ultimately be viewed as the reason why no ethnic clashes have been recorded in Ukraine so far. Even instructions requiring a high degree of change for people can become acceptable if control of compliance is loose, and it becomes socially and legally acceptable only to comply partially. Non-native Ukrainian speakers, or those whose Ukrainian is weak, might feel excluded from a strongly monolingual state as Ukrainian officially is, but are not excluded because Ukraine is monolingual only *de jure*, but not *de facto*. To assess whether the elites are aware of this situation and might even have created it, may be an interesting starting question for further research; what is important to this paper is that what is called nation-building results from the synergy of at least two sets of opposite (top and bottom) forces.

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