Towards World Russians? How Ukrainian Russophones Construct Boundaries from the Russian Federation

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Introduction

After the beginning of the war with Russia, many Ukrainians have rethought their relationship with Russian language and culture. Those who accepted Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism as a fact of life are now approaching it more critically, reassessing the impact of the legacy of Russification policies in imperial and Soviet times and the current use of the Russian language in Ukraine. The majority continue to strongly associate it with the Russian Federation and tend, in the light of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict (2014-), to interpret the lasting presence of the Russian language as a symbol and the vehicle of the perpetuation of the colonial impact of Russia on Ukraine[1]. This popular perception of Russian as a threat to Ukrainian society finds reflection in research, too. For instance, Hale *et al.*[2] correlate Ukrainians' exposure to the Russian language media with their propensity to support separatist movements in the country.

At the same time, there are many Ukrainians who still rely on Russian in many spheres of life. As of 2017, Russian has remained the language of preference for 25.1 percent of Ukrainians[3] in the East and South of the country, with 34.7 percent using it alongside Ukrainian[4]. This study traces how Ukrainian Russophones, in response to shifting (and increasingly negative) attitudes towards the Russian language, reframe their Russian use and, consequently, their Russophone identities.

This study builds on the body of primarily literary scholarship that has recently started viewing Russian as a pluricentric language and Ukrainian Russophone identities in Ukraine as a hybrid, applying postcolonial lenses to analyze Russophone literature in the post-Soviet space. It considers the ambiguities that arise from the position of Ukrainian Russophones who are straddling both mainstream Russian and Ukrainian communities.

This paper first provides a background into understanding the position of Ukrainian Russophones in the East of Ukraine, suggesting that the Russo-Ukrainian war has engendered a change in language use in Ukraine. The ongoing war makes maintaining economic and cultural ties between Ukraine and Russia unlikely. Ukrainians no longer see Russians residing in the Russian Federation as their potential interlocutors and thus, do not see the need to learn Russian to communicate with them. Meanwhile, those Ukrainians who already use Russian are reconsidering the boundaries of the communities of Russophones they consider themselves part of.

Secondly, it discusses how we can investigate the boundaries and ideologies of the communities of practice and imagined communities of Russian speakers as seen by the Russophones from Ukraine. We suggest analyzing how Russophones in Ukraine perceive the functionality of Russian language in their lives, its practical use, how they select the cultural content through which they develop Russian literacy, and how they construct attitudes toward different varieties of Russian and other languages.

We then apply our framework to analyze how a group of Russophones in Kharkiv – namely, the online community Khuevyi Khar'kov – constructs its

[1] V. Kulyk, *Shedding Russianness, Recasting Ukrainianness: The Post-Euromaidan Dynamics of Ethnonational Identifications in Ukraine*, "Post-Soviet Affairs", 2018 (34), 2-3, pp. 119-138.
[2] H. E. Hale *et al.*, *Believing Facts in the Fog of War: Identity, Media and Hot Cognition in Ukraine's 2014 Odesa Tragedy*, "Geopolitics", 2018 (23), 4, pp. 851-881.
[3] With the exception of the occupied territories.
[4] V. Kulyk, *Shedding Russianness*, op. cit., p. 129.

boundaries and negotiates its ideology and discuss the usefulness of this framework to the study of Russophonia, the "widespread and variegated uses of the Russian language outside of the customary boundaries of ethnicity and nation"[5].

We conclude that Russophones in Kharkiv have been constructing a distinct Russophone identity by several means, in order to exclude Russians of the Russian Federation from their imagined community of Russian speakers. Such means include rejecting the ties to the cultural actors from the Russian Federation, the state ideology of the Russian Federation, using language that monolingual Russian-speaking outsiders may not easily understand (for example, references embedded in local folklore), and employing Ukrainian-Russian linguistic hybridity.

Theoretical background

This study uses a language socialization and situated literacy perspective on language learning and sees the processes of literacy development and identity formation as interrelated. Like other studies on language and identity, it takes a social-constructivist approach. It is guided by the following three views on language development: language learning is language socialization; language users are agents whose multiple identities are dynamic and flexible; and language is a site of identity formation[6].

Following Norton[7], this paper views the process of language socialization as participation in communities of practice and imagined communities relying on the language one learns. Norton's theory of language learning as socialization into an imagined community stems from Anderson's view of the nation as an imagined political community, and as limited and sovereign[8]. In Norton's view, such different communities afford different identity options. As language learners socialize into these communities through literacy events they participate in, they develop an understanding of the literacy practices of these communities and, with them, of the roles and identities they can assume there by using the language they are learning. They also learn the identities they can choose to adopt, reject, or modify[9]. Any speaker of any language can be seen as a lifelong learner of this language. Thus, Russophones from Ukraine can be considered lifelong learners of both Russian and Ukrainian (and other) languages who develop their Russophone and Ukrainophone identities through participation in the real and imagined communities of Russian and Ukrainian speakers and reevaluate their learning needs as they learn about the identities they can assume in each community in their respective languages.

By literacy event, as defined by Heath, this paper assumes that "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes"[10], or an observable act of interaction with a text. Considering Barton and Hamilton[11] and Street[12], it views literacy practices as literacy events that are repeated, habitualized, and integrated into the lives of communities, or interpretation frameworks, observable units of behavior that involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships[13]. What is most relevant for our study is what happens, in Norton's view, when a learner's desired vision of their identity as a speaker of the language they are learning becomes incongruent with the options afforded to them by their community of practice. In such a case, learners may

[5] N. Caffee, *Russophonia: Towards a Transnational Conception of Russian-Language Literature*, PhD diss. University of California, Los Angeles 2013, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3z86s82v>, p. ii (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[6] A. Pavlenko, *"In the world of the tradition, I was unimagined": Negotiation of Identities in Cross-Cultural Autobiographies*, "International Journal of Bilingualism", 2001 (5), 3, pp. 317-344.

[7] B. Norton, *Identity and Language Learning*, Bristol-Buffalo-Toronto 2001.

[8] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London-New York 2006, p. 6.

[9] B. Norton, *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*, Bristol-Buffalo-Toronto 2013.

[10] S. B. Heath, *Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-shifting Oral and Literate Traditions*, in D. Tannen (ed. by), *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, Norwood [NJ] 1993, p. 93.

[11] D. Barton – M. Hamilton, *Literacy Practices. Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, in D. Barton *et al.* (ed. by), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, London-New York 2000.

[12] B. Street, *Introduction: The New Literacy Studies*, in Idem (ed. by), *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 1-21.

[13] D. Barton – M. Hamilton, *Literacy Practices*, op. cit., p. 7.

discontinue their participation in the current community of practice and, if they have invested a significant amount of time and resources into learning this language, look for one or even construct the one that corresponds better to their vision of their identity[14]. Applying this lens to the Ukrainian context would allow us to assume that the Ukrainian Russophones who have invested a significant amount of time and resources into learning Russian would, as they grow dissatisfied with the identity options offered to them by the available communities of Russian speakers, attempt to look for or construct the community of Russian speakers congruent with their vision of their identity.

Comparing the perspective of the 'community of practice' to existing perspectives on Russian language and Russophone identities in Ukraine

The communities of practice / imagined communities perspective allows us to consider the Russian language as pluricentric and Russophone identities as hybrid, whereby: (a) 'Ukrainian Russian' may not necessarily correspond to the standard Russian spoken in the Russian Federation; and (b) the Ukrainian Russophone identities may not necessarily perceive the Russian Federation as the center of their community and may include both Ukrainian and Russian speakers from Ukraine in their communities of practice and imagined communities. However, not all other perspectives on language and identity in Ukraine acknowledge this pluricentricity and hybridity.

The following paragraphs review recent publications that examine the use of Russian in Ukraine. The review is guided by the following questions: How has the use of the Russian language in Ukraine (and other post-Soviet spaces) been described in the academic literature? How have the different conceptualizations of Russophone identities contributed to the authors' understanding of the phenomena they focus on in their research? How can we use the communities of practice/imagined communities perspective to better understand the process of identity formation of Ukrainian Russophones?

Viewing Russian as pluricentric

Lately, humanities scholarship has seen a trend towards conceptualizing the use of Russian in non-essentialist terms and viewing the Russian language as pluricentric and the Ukrainian Russophone identities as hybrid, combining Ukrainian and Russian elements. Scholars such as Caffee[15], Chernetsky, Platt[16] and Puleri, who study Russian texts in global contexts, have observed that the writers who write in Russian from beyond the mainstream of the Russian Federation often hold distance from the canonical Russian literature. For example, in Kazakhstan where, while using Russian, writers often explored the themes, experiences, and identities that were atypical of canonic Russian literature, such as experiences of visible minorities[17]. These observations have given rise to the interest in framing and categorizing this new Russian-language writing and to analyzing the content that the writers who distance themselves from the mainstream Russian canon produce.

When analyzing and categorizing Russophone literature, the strand of academic literary criticism that operates from the perspective of pluricentricity of the Russian language accounts for writers' ethnic self-identification, their intended audience, the content of their writing, and the purpose of using Russian in their works. Different authors tend to have different approaches to combining these and ascribe different degrees of salience to each factor in their analysis, and it is by combining them in different ways that they try to elicit heterogenous Russophone identities.

In Caffee's categorization of the Russophone literature, ethnolinguistic, content, and functionality criteria are of equal importance. She refers to all literature written in Russian as Russophone

[14] B. Norton, *Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English*, "TESOL Quarterly", 1997 (31), 3, pp. 409-429.

[15] N. Caffee, *Russophonia*, op. cit.

[16] K. M.F. Platt, *Introduction: Putting Russian Cultures in Place*, in Idem (ed. by), *Global Russian Cultures*, Madison 2019, pp. 3-20.

[17] Caffee, *Russophonia*, op. cit.

and distinguishes between three major categories: Russian-language texts written by non-Russian identified authors, Russian-language texts written and published outside the Russian Federation by authors of any ethnicity or nationality (including Russian), and bilingual or multilingual writing and self-translation[18]. Thus, the first category is based on the authors' ethnic self-identification, and the second, on the content of their writing, as she points out that to be included in the second category, the writers must not merely be emigres, but must also explore the topic of Russianness "through the author's adaptation of the Russian language to non-Russian experiences and themes"[19]. Lastly, the third category focuses on functionality, as the writers whom Caffee sees belonging to it use the Russian language to reach wider (as in the case of self-translation) or narrower (as in the case of bilingual writing) audiences. Notably, concerning the second category, Caffee never specifies which themes count as Russian and non-Russian or what sources can be consulted to classify a given theme as Russian or non-Russian. She seems to simply assume that themes regarding experiences from outside of the Russian Federation are non-Russian, thus, to some extent, reproducing the essentialist criteria she aims to transcend by setting forth the idea of pluricentricity of Russian.

This shortcoming of relying on geographical determinism in analyzing culture was (indirectly) addressed by Platt, who interrogated the uncritical essentialist assumptions that shape definitions of Russian and Russophone cultures. His question is clearly pronounced in the introduction to his edited volume *Global Russian Cultures*: "Where is Russian culture properly located?"[20]. The chapters comprising the volume suggest that it may or may not be located in every user of Russian, depending on whether they believe it's located within them. Thus, Chernetsky assumes the authors' self-identification as the primary criterion for categorizing their writing as Russian, non-Russian, or other Russophone. In doing so, in his classification of Ukrainian Russophone literature, he follows Mikhail Gendelev's approach to classifying Russophone literature of Israel, dividing it into at least three different groups: Russophone writers who primarily identify as members of a global Russian speaking diaspora; those who primarily identify with Russian literature of the metropole; and a portion of writers who believe that local realities "demand new means of expression, aesthetic models that did not exist earlier in Russian literature"[21].

Similar approaches to categorization are shared by other literary scholars who also adopt self-identification as the primary criterion for differentiating between Russian and other Russophone writers as well as among the latter. Puleri, for instance, uses the authors' self-identification as the primary criterion for classifying Ukrainian Russophone writers arguing that "the developments of the national question should be viewed and interpreted within the broader context of the search for new self-identification in post-Soviet societies"[22]. It is only in his further analysis that Puleri elicits the themes common for the writers self-identifying as Ukrainian Russophone writers.

Overall, this strand of scholarship takes the self-identification of Russophone authors into account virtually without exception when categorizing them and their works. Especially when they analyze this content against the backdrop of the local sociopolitical realities, they seem to acknowledge that "'being Russian' or 'performing Russian culture' is always subject to local constraints, but those constraints, and therefore the content of 'Russianness' as well, are distinct in each new context"[23]. In conclusion, according to this logic, Russian has become a pluricentric language.

Viewing Russian as monocentric

Meanwhile, other scholars analyzing Russophone identities do not view self-identification of the

[18] Ivi, p. 38.
[19] Ivi, p. 39.
[20] K. M.F. Platt, *Introduction*, op. cit., p. 3.
[21] V. Chernetsky, *Russophone Writing*, op. cit., p. 61.
[22] M. Puleri, *Ukrainian, Russophone, (Other) Russian*, op. cit., p. 33.
[23] K. M.F. Platt, *Introduction*, op. cit., p. 6.

Ukrainian Russophones as a determining factor. They instead perceive Russophone identities in essentialist terms and insist on framing both Russian language and Ukrainian-Russian hybridity as a problem. The idea that the use of Russian correlates with the support of the Russian-oriented policies first emerged in Mykola Ryabchuk's writing[24] when he articulated the idea of "Two Ukraines": the Ukrainian-speaking one and the Russian-speaking one. And even though it was later contested, it remained a point of reference and discussion for many scholars from various disciplines. For instance, the Ukrainian sociolinguist Larysa Masenko wrote a book[25] in which she approached both the use of Russian and of Ukrainian-Russian hybridity in Ukraine as problematic and emblematic of continuing colonial oppression of Ukraine by Russia, thus equating Russian language and Russian Federation. Other studies from across disciplines demonstrate that linguistic determinism (the concept that the worldview of a person is determined by the language they speak) is still prominent elsewhere as well. In the Ukrainian context, linguistic determinism means that a Russian speaker may not be able to become fully Ukrainian. For instance, the study by Onuch and Hale[26], even while claiming that it aims to elicit variety among Ukrainian Russophones and transcend linguistic determinism that often guides interpretations of their identities, nevertheless, falls short of doing so as it is rooted in an essentialist perspective on Ukrainian language and identity. The authors suggest that being embedded in a Ukrainian-speaking language environment "regardless of what language one might actually prefer to speak is likely to be associated with interests or viewpoints that may be shared by or conveyed through Ukrainian-speaking networks"[27], thus suggesting that it is only possible for Ukrainian Russophones to develop a Ukrainian identity through Ukrainian, not through Russian.

Differences in perceiving the role of Russophone identities

The different views on the nature of Russophone identities in Ukraine generate different interpretations of their role and future in Ukrainian society. Scholars approaching Russian as pluricentric tend to see the continuing presence of Russian in Ukraine and the Ukrainian-Russian hybridity as productive for the emergence of new identities transcending ethnolinguistic cleavages in Ukraine, as opposed to those who approach Russian in an essentialist manner, viewing the practice of speaking Russian as an expression of support for the politics of Russian Federation and, therefore, as a problem for Ukraine.

For instance, the idea that Russophone identities in Ukraine are non-homogenous and that, as such, some of them do not necessarily conform to what's considered mainstream Russian or Ukrainian allows Puleri to suggest that they produce "new symbolic codes in order to interpret the existential and cultural condition of Ukrainian postcoloniality"[28]. Similarly, Chernetsky has referred to the Russian language Ukrainian writing as a "rich site for developing a new socio-cultural project"[29]. These Ukrainian Russian-language cultural actors and their allies, Puleri suggests, are "prompting the formation of a new 'civic' identity today"[30]. Puleri explains that this is due to the fact that unlike the ethnic Ukrainians speaking Ukrainian who could readily fit into ethnonationalist paradigm, Russophone Ukrainians had to look for other ways to conceptualize their relationship with the Ukrainian state and, thus, were in a more productive position to arrive at envisioning civic values as the core of the Ukrainian society[31]. Here, quoting Pavlyshyn, he also offers that "the rise of hybrid subjectivities in Ukrainian society could potentially become the only way to 'transcend both colonial arrogance and anti-colonial rancour'"[32]. Meanwhile, those who see the Russian language as monocentric

[24] M. Riabchuk, *Dvi Ukraïny*, "Krytyka", 2001 (5), 10, pp. 10-13.
[25] L. Masenko, *Surzhyk: Mizh Movoyu i yazikom*, Kyïv 2019.
[26] O. Onuch – H. E. Hale, *Capturing Ethnicity: the Case of Ukraine*, "Post-Soviet Affairs", 2018 (34), 2-3, pp. 84-106.
[27] Ivi, p. 9.
[28] M. Puleri, *Ukrainian, Russophone, (Other) Russian*, op. cit., p. 121.
[29] V. Chernetsky, *Russophone Writing*, op. cit., p. 66.
[30] M. Puleri, *Ukrainian, Russophone, (Other) Russian*, op. cit., p. 166.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] Ivi, p. 233.

tend to see it as a problem for the Ukrainian society and argue for creating conditions for Ukrainian monolingualism to emerge.

Beyond Political Narratives: Shifting Boundaries of the Communities of Russophones in Unoccupied Ukraine

The theoretical framework of communities of practice and imagined communities allows us to see also how, in the course of the war between Ukraine and Russia, Ukrainian Russophones have been reshaping the boundaries of their imagined communities of Russian speakers centripetally and centrifugally, simultaneously as a reaction to the discourse of Russkiy Mir in Russia and as a consequence of developing closer communal ties within the Ukrainian society. Both have been leading to the gradual exclusion of the Russian speakers from Russia from these imagined communities and to consolidating the local Russophone identities.

The identity choices and roles outlined for Russophone Ukrainians by the Russian Federation in the Russkiy Mir ideology turned out to be dissatisfactory for many of them. The eponymous foundation established by the presidential decree of the Russian President in 2007 promotes the idea that the Russian speakers in the post-Soviet space constitute "ethnoterritorial communities that previously had belonged to a larger biopolitical entity"[33], since they are Russians who happened to live beyond the borders of Russia not by choice, but due to the inaccurate drawing of state borders in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The idea of Russkiy Mir stems from the 19th and 20th-century ideologies of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians being "fraternal nations" and "almost the same people". This ideology was developed, among others, by the émigré Russian publicist Ivan Ilyin, whose writings are rooted in nationalist and fascist ideologies and frame Russian culture as superior to those of the Slavic peoples. This idea denies the value of the elements of other Slavic cultures, including Ukrainian, because they are not Russian. Thus, anyone who subscribes to this ideology may suggest that it would be best for the Slavic peoples to abandon these distinctions and assimilate into Russian culture[34].

At the beginning of the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, the Russian Federation suggested that Ukrainians' demands for the President of Ukraine to sign association agreements with the European Union (his refusal to do so having served as a catalyst for the protests) could be interpreted as an attack against the Russkiy Mir. As a part of the community that was allegedly under attack, Ukrainian Russophones (according to the Russian Federation) were entitled to help from the Russian Federation. And with Ukraine having a long history of political parties attempting to mobilize groups along the ethnolinguistic lines[35] and many Russian-speakers long accustomed to the version of reality broadcasted via Russian media, some Russophones in Ukraine started accepting this narrative[36]. It has only helped that Russia has intensified fearmongering in its state media. For instance, on the eve of the annexation of Crimea, major Russian news outlets were running (fake) stories about 'Banderites' threatening Russian speakers. Ryabchuk suggests that these news stories were "central in (mis)representing the Euromaidan protests as a 'fascist coup' in the mass media of both Yanukovych and Putin"[37]. The term Banderite derives from the name of the leader of the underground Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Stepan Bandera, and it is used by Russians to stereotype Ukrainians as violent nationalists[38]. By resurrecting this term during the Revolution of Dignity, state Russian media suggested that Ukrainian Russophones cannot be safe in Ukraine. Those Russophones who accepted the narrative of one community of Russian speakers have joined separatist movements in Crimea and on Donbas.

[33] M. Pieper, *Russkiy mir: the Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad*, "Geopolitics", 2020 (25), 3, p. 775.

[34] M. Riabchuk, *Ukrainians as Russia's Negative 'Other': History Comes Full Circle*, "Communist and Post-Communist Studies", 2016 (49), 1, p. 75.

[35] V. Kulyk, *Language Identity, Linguistic Diversity, and Political Cleavages: Evidence from Ukraine*, "Nations and Nationalism", 2011 (17), 3, pp. 627-648.

[36] H. E. Hale *et al.*, *Believing Facts*, op. cit.

[37] M. Ryabchuk, *Ukraine*, op. cit., p. 82.

[38] Ivi, p. 80.

However, another group of Russian speakers rejected their identity as 'Russians', or as almost Russians, after suffering unfair treatment in the community ruled by Ukrainian nationalists. Many of them decided not to participate in the separatist movements, desiring instead to reconnect with their motherland. Thus, Dnipro region residents distanced themselves from the Russian community and its main narrative from the beginning[39]. Few of them participated in Antimaidan, gatherings in support of unity with the Russian Federation that emerged in response to the Euromaidan, the Revolution of Dignity. The Kharkiv region, in its turn, has declined to participate in the Russkiy Mir with the beginning of the war in Donbas. Even though the Antimaidan movement was rather pronounced in Kharkiv at the beginning of 2014, and even though the series of events similar to the ones in Donetsk and Luhansk, such as the storming of city and regional administrations by the foreign and local supporters of the unity of these regions with Russia, started unfolding in Kharkiv, they haven't ended up with an establishment of the so-called People's Republic in Kharkiv as they did in Donetsk and Luhansk[40]. It is evident then that not all Russophones were satisfied with the identity affordances offered to them from the Russian Federation side. It allows us to assume that they would look for other imagined communities that would allow them to retain their Russophone identities and simultaneously distance themselves from the Russian Federation.

It is, instead, much more challenging to understand precisely how the internal processes in Ukraine have shifted the boundaries of Russophone communities. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the reactions of the Ukrainian Russophones to the discourse of revitalization of Ukrainian language and culture and to the identities that this narrative affords to them. I have argued elsewhere in more detail that the revitalization of Ukrainian language and culture rooted in essentialist premises about language, culture, and nation, and resulting in a language as a problem orientation[41] towards Russian in language planning has not been perceived unanimously by all Ukrainian Russophones[42]. We can observe this lack of congruence among them in how while some have fully embraced the discourse of revitalization and switched to Ukrainian in all spheres of life[43], others keep using Russian even in the domains where Ukrainian language policies require to use Ukrainian[44]. And, so long as there aren't enough studies exploring the reasons underlying Ukrainian Russophones' reluctance to fully participate in the revitalization, we can only speculate about these reasons (Is it due to the imperial sentiments of the superiority of Russian over Ukrainian still shared by some Russian speakers? Or is it due to the lack of resources for adults to develop the knowledge of and to practice Ukrainian? Or is the lack of meaningful economic and other incentives that's the cause? Or maybe all or none of these factors are at play?). So, noting the undeniable importance of the interaction with the revitalization discourse for Ukrainian Russophones' perception of their Russophone identities, here we will only partially address this factor and leave the more detailed exploration of this interaction for future research.

We still can observe how internal processes in Ukraine have likely impacted Ukrainian Russophones' perception of the boundaries of the community of Russian speakers they can imagine themselves to be a part of. The war with Russia has had complex consequences for Ukrainian society. On the one hand, with a part of Ukrainian territories and populations becoming de facto occupied and ruled by a foreign entity, it has alienated a part of the country from itself. But, on the other hand, re-

[39] N. Kupensky, *The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in Donbas*, <https://www.danyliwseminar.com/nick-kupensky> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[40] T. Kuzio, *Euromaidan Revolution, Crimea and Russia–Ukraine War: Why It is Time for a Review of Ukrainian-Russian Studies*, "Eurasian Geography and Economics", 2018 (59), 3-4, pp. 529-553.

[41] R. Ruiz, *Orientations in Language Planning*, "NABE Journal", 1984 (8), 2, pp. 15-34.

[42] A. Vozna, *Reasons for Success and Failure of the Revitalization of Ukrainian in Eastern Ukraine*, <https://www.danyliwseminar.com/anna-vozna> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[43] L. Bilaniuk, *Linguistic Conversions: Nation-Building on the Self*, "Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Societies", 2020 (6), 1, pp. 59-82.

[44] Kulyk, *Shedding Russianness*, op. cit.

sisting the common external enemy has engendered conditions for increased cooperation within it, resulting in the consolidation of the Ukrainian society and in Ukrainian Russophones identifying more strongly with it[45]. We can observe this increased identification of the Russophone Ukrainians with a broader Ukrainian community in their increasing pace and rates of participation in the revitalization of the Ukrainian language and culture.

Overall, since the beginning of the Euromaidan protests or, since the first postcolonial revolution in Ukraine[46], Russophone Ukrainians have found themselves at the intersection of a variety of narratives on identity. None of these narratives has proved altogether satisfactory or accurate for them. On the one hand, RF has attempted to construct a narrative of continuing unity among all Russian-speaking people in the post-Soviet space and, particularly, among the Russian-speaking people in what their narrative calls "fraternal nations" of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus[47]. For Ukrainian Russophones participating in the imagined community which accepts this narrative, this has meant suffering and subjecting other Ukrainians to suffering the continuing symbolic and physical violence from the former colonizer, which is why many refused to accept it. However, the dominant narrative of the other community they could turn to, Ukrainian society, positioned their language as a problem, associating it directly with the Russian invasion in Ukraine and continuing colonial oppression more generally. Still, for Ukrainian Russophones, cooperation with the latter seems to be pronouncedly more beneficial than with the former, involving the only slight discomfort of learning to use Ukrainian, as a way of revitalizing the Ukrainian language and culture (as opposed to a real and prominent threat of physical violence and displacement). So, it seems natural that Russian speakers who learn Russian in Ukraine would narrow their imagined community of Russian speakers to exclude (the majority of) the Russian speakers from the Russian Federation and expanded it to include the Ukrainian speakers from Ukraine there to a greater extent.

Eliciting Russophone Ukrainians' perception of the communities of practice/imagined communities of Russian speakers

Methodology

To explore how the Ukrainian Russophones envision the boundaries of their community, this study relies on narrative inquiry, which is the primary method used in identity and literacy research to define the identities of the language learners. Researchers study identity texts and other sources, the main criteria for their selection being that they "foreground individuals' sense-making of their experience as well as the complexity of individual/social relationships"[48]. By identity texts, identity and literacy researchers understand a broad range of texts that have traditionally included narratives collected through fieldwork[49] from existing autobiographical and biographical accounts. However, recently, it has become increasingly common for the researchers in this field to reconstruct learners' identities from a wider collection of sources such as ethnographic observations and other ethnographic methods, interviews, written responses to researchers' questions[50], and descriptions of people holding certain identities in the media[51], using critical discourse analysis methods.

[45] D. Arel, *How Ukraine has Become More Ukrainian*, "Post-Soviet Affairs", 2018 (34), 2-3, pp. 186-189.

[46] I. Gerasimov, *Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum*, "Ab Imperio", 2014, 3, pp. 22-44.

[47] G. Sasse – A. Lackner, *War and Identity: the Case of the Donbas in Ukraine "Post-Soviet Affairs"* , 2018 (34), 2-3, pp. 139-157.

[48] B. Norton, *Identity and Language Learning: Extending*, op. cit.

[49] G. Barkhuizen, *A Narrative Approach to Exploring Context in Language Teaching*, "ELT Journal", 2008 (62), 3, pp. 231-239; M. Early – B. Norton, *Narrative Inquiry in Second Language Teacher Education in Rural Uganda*, "Narrative Research in Applied Linguistics", 2013, pp. 132-151.

[50] K. Toohey, *Learning English at School: Identity, Social Relations and Classroom Practice*, Clevedon 2000; P. I. De Costa, *The Chasm Widens: The Trouble with Personal Identity in Singapore Writing*, in M. Mantero (ed. by), *Identity and Second Language Learning: Culture, Inquiry, and Dialogic Activity in Educational Contexts*, Charlotte [NC] 2007, pp. 190-234.

[51] T. Omoniyi, *Discourse and Identity*, in K. Hyland – B. Paltridge (ed. by), *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*, London 2011, pp. 260-278.

This study follows the latter approach and reconstructs the identities of the Ukrainian Russophones from interactions in the social media community Khuevyi Khar'kov. We consider it appropriate to interpret this source as an identity text due to the self-proclaimed role of this community as a site of negotiation of Kharkiv identity. In analyzing the data, we aim to illustrate how the participants of Khuevyi Khar'kov exclude the Russophones of the Russian Federation from their community of practice and imagined community through attitudes they express, functionality, and audience reach of their communication. We do so by answering the following questions: How do the Ukrainian Russophones construct the boundaries of their community of practice? What linguistic and thematic devices do they use to distinguish their community of speakers of Russian from other communities of speakers of Russian?

Data

For this study, we have analyzed posts and interactions from an online community of Kharkiv citizens on Instagram. The community Khuevyi Khar'kov was established back in the late 2000s on another social media platform vk.com (then – vkontakte.ru). However, with new policies limiting the use of the RF-based social media platforms, it has moved to Facebook and Instagram. More people engage with Instagram than with the Facebook community, and which is why we chose to analyze the former in this study. The community page has over 340,000 subscribers, meaning that it reaches a significant portion of the population of Kharkiv, which totaled 1.419 million people in 2017[52].

The initial purpose of this community was for the Kharkiv citizens to exchange information about disturbing occurrences in their city. The community page on the vk.com[53], which still has over 250,000 subscribers, is introduced in the About section as follows: "There won't be any of the fucked up excited posts, stupid jokes, and discussions about why Kharkiv is the best city in the world. Open your eyes: you live in a trashy village. You are surrounded by cops, thugs, and dealers. Everything. Is. Very. Bad"[54]. And, indeed, this community has primarily served as an outlet for citizens' negative feelings about the city. However, contrary to the initial promise, it has also turned into a space where its users exercise their wit in describing the otherwise seemingly depressing occurrences in the city.

The community receives its content via its users, who suggest it to moderators, who in turn publish this content from the community name. And while some of the users suggest their updates on Kharkiv life in neutral language, many decide to add color to their grim observations. For instance, a user who posted a photo of a green puddle, apparently a result of chemical spillage, accompanied their photo with a congratulatory message, wishing his fellow citizens a happy St. Patrick's Day[55] (the picture [Fig. 1] taken in October, the poster and the audience are likely aware that the two events are hardly related).

As the number of such posts grew, the function of this community as a venue for the creative interpretation of local realities became more prominent. Clever, innovative language and a decidedly non-neutral stance on city happenings (as exemplified in the name, the About description, and in posts) has reduced the audience of its readers and created a unique community of practice of Ukrainian Russophones. The following paragraphs will explore in greater detail how the community has defined its boundaries through the choice of themes and lan-

[52] Understandably, the actual number of Kharkiv citizens in this community is likely to be significantly lower, as not all the subscribers may be from Kharkiv, and some may not even be real people. And, since finding out the data of the subscribers of this community doesn't seem possible, we can only guess the actual number of actual users from Kharkiv. Even so, the number is likely to remain significant.

[53] Khuevyi Khar'kov, <https://vk.com/h_kharkov> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[54] "Здесь не будет восторженно-припезденых постов, плоских шуточек и обсуждения, почему Харьков – самый-самый город на земле. Открой глаза: ты живешь в быдлячей деревне. Тебя окружают мусора, гопы и барыги. Все. Очень. Плохо".

[55] textitS Dnëm Sviatogo Patrika, Khuevchane, <https://scontent.fyyc3-1.fna.fbcdn.net/v/t31.18172-8/15042150_1325546677464935_8265716828189091 18_o.jpg?_nc_cat=109&ccb=1-3&_nc_sid=8bfeb9&_nc_ohc=vyfLveTP6XYAX_9joGZ&_nc_ht=scontent.fyyc3-1.fna&oh=d18c9bffc2343a81729a9afea493ca4c&oe=60FAA5B4> (latest access: 23.06.2021).

Fig. 1. Khuevyi Khar'kov user congratulates fellow citizens on St. Patrick's Day.

guage, and how such choices have contributed to it becoming a unique community of practice of Russian, markedly different from the mainstream community of Russian speakers in the Russian Federation.

How the community defines its boundaries

The community signals its boundaries by using and creating folk names for locations in Kharkiv known only by their official names to outsiders. Thus, for instance, a city district close to the *Heroiv Pratsi* [Heroes of labor] subway station is more often than not referred to as *Gerosha* [Gerosha]. And when there was a fire in a newly built mall called Nikolsky, KK users jumped onto the opportunity to rename it as *Gorelyi* [The Burnt One] and have since referred to it as such.

Moreover, with a consistent audience, Khuevyi Khar'kov has developed recurring references to similar events that have become deeply ingrained in its literacy practices. These references can be leveraged to indicate the political identities of Kharkiv citizens. Some notable examples include references to Kharkiv ex-governor Mikhail Dobkin and ex-mayor Hennadii Kernes. The community of Khariv has interpreted the roles of both, but especially of Kernes, differently from the mainstream Ukrainian and Russian media, thus creating a distinct local political discourse.

Kernes used to be Kharkiv's mayor from 2010 to 2020. He is widely known in Ukraine and in Russophone spaces beyond Ukraine for his peculiar manner of talking to people. In some cases, his peculiar language has even turned him into a meme. His most memetic appearance was in the video he filmed for Dobkin's political campaign, with Dobkin himself[56]. The video captures Dobkin reading his campaign text several times on set while Kernes criticizes his attempts from backstage. The informal communication style of the two colleagues and their creative use of profanities was, apparently, so inconsistent with the image of public servants holding such high offices that the video has by now captured the attention of more than six million viewers (or four times the population of Kharkiv). This video earned Kernes recognition as an author of unconventional insults, with the most innocent being, "you have a boring face, no one will give you money". Since then, many more of his unique zingers have entered local folklore and become symbolic of Kharkiv's identity. Lately, though, and more so after his death from Covid-19 related complications in 2020, media started interpreting his role in Kharkiv more broadly than that of a meme generator. BBC Ukraine, BBC Russia, and the Russian-language outlet Meduza[57], based in Latvia, have suggested that he was beloved by Kharkiv citizens for his contributions to the city infrastructure and appearance and that he played a crucial role in keeping Kharkiv region from joining Luhansk and Donetsk ones in their quest to gain

[56] *Mer goroda Khar'kova Mikhail Dobkin*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3z2wheJWyk> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[57] *Umer mer Kharkova Kernes. Mnogie zapomnili ego kak memnogo 'Gepu', no voobshche-to on byl politikom iz-za kotorogo ne poiavilas kharkovskaia narodnaia respublika*, <https://meduza.io/episodes/2020/12/17/umer-mer-harkova-kernes-mnogie-zapomnili-ego-kak-memnogo-gepu-no-voobsche-to-on-byl-politikom-iz-za-kotorogo-ne-poyavilas-harkovskaya-narodnaya-respublika> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

independence from Ukraine.

These interpretations of Kernes's role and status among Kharkiv citizens are not shared in Khuevyi Khar'kov, though. Although the community does recognize his symbolic contribution to the emergence of Kharkiv identity, it stops short of praising the achievements that outsiders tend to attribute to him. For instance, KK has developed versions of a Kharkiv citizen card (in response to the contest for the best design of such an ID announced by a new mayor) with Kernes's quotes[58]. They also routinely refer to the ability to recognize and interpret his phrases as a marker of a Kharkiv citizen, as in the case of a newly installed XO-shaped sculpture that could mean "hugs and kisses" for all but true Kharkivites who, according to KK, should be able to discern a distinct Kharkiv meaning in it[59] (apparently, a reference to Kernes's threat to multiply a municipal services department head by zero)[60]. Moreover, whenever Kernes is mentioned in KK, users unite in a communal quest to fill the comments section with as many of his aphorisms as possible.

When it comes to his political achievements and city improvements though, the KK audience isn't as fast to acknowledge him. They do not hesitate to point out his flaws, including his corruption.

For instance, they commemorated his death by announcing an interview that was supposed to shed light on the sources of his and his lovers' private properties[61], and they described the hanging of his portrait in the city hall as a great and sentimental way to ensure that, even dead, he can supervise theft of government funds[62]. The KK community mocks the pious tone of mainstream Kharkiv media toward Kernes and instead views him, even in his death, as a crook. KK has referred to Kernes as *Ludshij* [a mocking spelling of *the best*] and *Solntselikij* [sun-faced] thus signaling, with their ironic attitude, their disagreement with a widespread perception Kernes as a revered mayor of Kharkiv and pointing out the lack of criticism of him in media.

Overall, critical discussions of the conditions of life in Kharkiv in the KK have resulted in this community developing a uniquely local lens through which to assess local political personalities. Their perceptions become reflected in the local language in unique names and references discernable almost exclusively to local residents, excluding outsiders from participation in the KK community.

Excluding Russian speakers from the Russian Federation through the articulation of difference

A person we interviewed for another study, a professor from a university in Kharkiv, offers a curious interpretation of why not all Russophones in Eastern Ukraine rush to adopt Ukrainian in all spheres of life. "[Using Ukrainian] could be useful to mark differences from Russia, but I don't think it's too necessary because the difference is already very pronounced", he said, referring to cultural and worldview differences between the Russophones who do and who don't support Russian occupation of Ukraine. It is the articulation of such differences through which KK constructs the boundaries of its audience to exclude the Russophones from RF.

Firstly, KK members consistently express their dissatisfaction with the presence of mainstream media personalities from RF and others embodying Russian values in Ukraine. For instance, they respond positively to posts about these media personalities being banned from Ukraine. Some are skeptical that banning Russian singers is really a matter of importance, referring to such bans, ironically, as "serious measures to prevent criminal activities"[63]. Others openly express their support and their reasoning. For example, one user referred to the banned celebrities as "шваль из Расее"[64] and was grate-

[58] *Topchik tut obiavil konkurs na kartochki khuevchanina*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQgX37ujXPe/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[59] *Rebus, razgadat' kotoryi smozhet tolko istinnyi khuevchanin v TRTS 'Gorelii'*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQBaLZjjuw2/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[60] *Suchii pes, ia tebia umnozhu na nol' – Kernes*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7vsDX1jGJY> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[61] *Kto tam za Ludshim skuchaet?* , <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKy2IIKln9F/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[62] *Sentimental'nost' urovnia vorsoveta*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMehtyEFHGM/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[63] <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQfu1UbjgVT/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[64] "Good-for nothings from Russia" (misspelled, likely intentionally,

ful that there would be fewer of them [in Ukraine] now. Similarly, the post about the activities of the Russian Orthodox church in the city referred to as "Утренний движ московского патриархата"[65] was met with negative reactions for the mere presence of the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kharkiv, demanding that they be sent back to Russia. KK users' comments on the event ranged from the politically neutral "Сборище долбоебов"[66] to more explicit anti-RF ones such as "Кгбшники в рясах"[67], "Шоу московських кабанів!"[68], and "масковские чекисты"[69]. And while some KK users simply explained that they see the Russian Orthodox Church as a foreign element in their environment, others insisted that it should be removed immediately and confined to RF territory. Some such demands for their evacuation included, "А можно они уже все дружно в Москву уйдут, пожалуйста?"[70] and "Коли вони зап@здять на Московію з кінцями"[71], and "Выслать их на раисию....пусть крестничают"[72].

These examples illustrate how Russophone KK users note the cultural differences between them and the Russian speakers from RF and distance themselves from the latter by explicitly framing the RF ones as foreign to their location through geographical references.

Besides distancing themselves from public figures whose role is perceived as problematic in Ukraine, KK users also seek to break away from the very ideas associated with the RF. For example, they distance themselves from the homophobia that is prominent in the RF mainstream fundamentalist discourse. They asserted this distinction and distance by ironically inviting homophobes to assemble in the comments under the post about a store supporting Pride month[73].

They established a connection between homophobia and RF by using a well-known word *skrepi* ([spiritual] foundations), stemming from the RF fundamentalist discourse to refer to those who oppose Pride month symbols: "Скрєпоносці в коментарях зламались"[74].

The last strategy by which KK users construct the boundaries of their community from other Russian speakers that we are going to address here is that of assuming distance from the Russian speakers of Ukraine who support unity and/or negotiations with RF. Such construction of the boundaries between the different Russophones living in Ukraine is notable since it, like the construction of the boundaries with the RF ideology with the RF, is based on pointing out ideological rather than geographical differences. We see a prime example of how KK users distinguish between such groups in a post featuring leaflets that claim, "God saves those who live in Ukraine"[75]. In responses to this post, KK users agreed that, while God may save those who live in Ukraine[76], he may not be as graceful towards those who live in *the* Ukraine[77]. Additionally, KK users routinely cheer when pro-Russian media personalities from Ukraine such as Anatolii Sharii are wanted by Ukrainian police[78] and have referred to the Ukrainian President inviting Russian propagandists and supporters of a pro-Russian politician Medvechuk as "зрада" [betrayal][79].

to signal disrespect).

[65] "Morning commotion of Moscow's patriarchate", <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPlWvvLDYbg/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[66] "Gathering of dumbfucks".

[67] "KGB agents in habits".

[68] "Moscow hogs show" [in Ukrainian].

[69] "Moscow [misspelled, likely intentionally, to signal disrespect] Checkists [secret service agents]".

[70] "Could they all please leave for Moscow?"

[71] "When will they all finally leave the f*ck for Moscow?" [in Ukrainian].

[72] "Send them away to Russia [misspelled, likely intentionally, to signal disrespect]... let them walk with crosses there".

[73] *Posle raskritikovannikh kreditok* [...], <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQWAUYaD4oY/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[74] "*Skrepi* bearers have collapsed in the comments" [in Ukrainian].

[75] *Uspokoitel'nye lisovki vidaut na Univere*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPqTwO8j_iO/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[76] "в Украине", the preposition "в" being typical for Ukrainians.

[77] "на Украине", the preposition "на" being typical for Russians.

[78] *SBU oholosyla Anatoliiu Shariu pidozru u derzhzradi*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLWvftYFtot/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[79] *A tem vremenem Imperator priglasil predstavitelei razlichnikh SMI* [...], <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPxXW_JjvZ8/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

Including Bilingual Ukrainians through hybridity

Another notable way in which KK constructs the boundaries of its community is through linguistic hybridity. KK users address their audience in both Ukrainian and Russian. Using both languages results in the content of the community being accessible in its entirety only to bilingual Russian and Ukrainian speakers. And even though the majority of the content is in Russian, the use of Ukrainian in posts and in comments still limits understanding for monolingual speakers from the RF and excludes them.

Consider this example of how KK users organically and innovatively used two languages to interact with the post about high temperatures in the city[80]. The post contained a picture of a thermometer showing an abnormally high temperature and was captioned in Russian. A user responded to it in Ukrainian, quoting the line from the Ukrainian anthem (not precisely, but in an unmistakably recognizable way), which then sparked follow-up responses in both languages.

На Гагарина уже почти ад нахуй
- Ще не вмерла Україна
- з такою температурой, скоро помре
- с такой температурой ненадолго...[81]

This and other similar examples seem noteworthy not simply because they contain two languages; after all, it has long been the case in Ukraine that bilingual speakers used two languages simultaneously in their interactions, the phenomenon Bilaniuk refers to as "non-accommodating bilingualism". It is the dynamics between the interlocutors and the primacy of the communicative goal over the choice of the language that captures attention. As Bilaniuk's studies of non-accommodating bilingualism show, it used to be the case that when linguistic accommodations did happen in bilingual interactions, those who chose to speak Russian almost never accommodated Ukrainian speakers, but rather the reverse might happen[82]. In the KK interaction here though, the dynamics are different – the two users who chose Ukrainian, the one who posted the line from the national anthem and the one who responded to him are, judging from their IG profiles (both open and both with pictures taken in Kharkiv, with captions and interactions in Russian), Russophones. Thus, this interaction exemplifies not only accommodation of a Russophone to a Ukrainian speaker (as in the case of the user responding to the anthem line in Ukrainian), but also a voluntary choice of a Russophone to use Ukrainian for the sake of making what they likely considered, a joke. What's notable about this interaction is that it exemplifies the trend towards active, not only passive, knowledge of Ukrainian becoming a necessary condition for full participation in the even predominantly Russophone Ukrainian community.

Discussion

In this study, we have applied the imagined communities conceptual framework from the field of language and literacy education studies to elicit how the Russophones from Ukraine construct the boundaries of their community. Using this framework allowed us to start from the assumption that it is not the language per se, but the literacy practices of the communities through which one socializes into this language and the imagined communities they intend to participate in using this language that contributes to shaping people's outlook, identities and ways of relating to others. Additionally, applying this framework to the Ukrainian context has allowed us to notice the preconditions for Ukrainian Russophones' dissatisfaction with the identity options afforded to them in the Russian Federation-propagated narrative of Russkii Mir and, thus, has allowed us to expect that the Ukrainian Russophones would attempt

[80] *Na Gagarina uzhe pochti ad nakhui*, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQjEYNvjhqF/> (latest access: 10.12.2021).

[81] (It's already pretty much fucking hell on Gagarina [Russian]
- Ukraine has not perished yet [Ukrainian]
- With such temperatures, it will perish soon [Ukrainian, but with a Russian case ending of the word 'temperatures']
- It won't last long with such temperatures... [Russian])

[82] L. Bilaniuk, *Cultural Politics on Ukrainian Television: Language Choice and Code-Switching on "Khoroshou"*, "Canadian-American Slavic Studies", 2010 (44), 1-2, pp. 200-216.

to construct their own community of practice of Russian in such a way as to exclude the Russian speakers from RF and include the bilingual Ukrainian and Russian speakers from Ukraine.

We approached the online community Khuevyi Khar'kov, as a community of speakers of Russian in its own right, with its own literacy practices, marked by distinct attitudes and functionality, and we observed how the members of the community constructed its boundaries through the community literacy events. This study has allowed us to make more informed assumptions about the literacy practices and values of the community and, therefore, about the identities of its members. We have observed that KK members use a variety of strategies to include insiders and exclude outsiders. Most notably, KK relies on linguistic hybridity to exclude monolingual Russophones from Russia and the Russophones from Ukraine who may have negative attitudes towards the Ukrainian language and Ukrainization. Besides, it constructs the boundaries of its audience to exclude these groups by targeting, criticizing, and even attacking values associated with mainstream Russian discourse.

We believe that the findings of this study allow us to comprehensively interpret the scope and implications of practicing Russophone identities in Ukraine, thus making a meaningful contribution to the previous interpretations. Below are the specific aspects which we see as most useful for understanding past research, as well as for expanding this field of inquiry going forward.

Firstly, we weren't guided by pre-existing theories about the connection between Russian language use / Russophone identity in Ukraine and ideology of the community, but we tried to explore this ideology during our analysis. And while other studies also don't treat Russophone identities in an overly simplistic manner, attempting to understand the experience of being a Russophone in Ukraine through mere theoretical questioning, we believe that our dynamic approach allows us to take the perspective of the Ukrainian Russophones into account in a more profound way.

After all, asking how important one or the other aspect of a Russophone identity is for the participants assumes that this aspect is at least somewhat important. Meanwhile, if we begin with what participants talk about themselves, we may find that some of the points that researchers traditionally interpret as important aspects of a Russophone identity in Ukraine may not bear any significance for certain Russophones at all. For example, one study[83] asked how important it is for them to maintain continuity with Soviet heritage, likely assuming that using Russian, a product of a Soviet Russification, may correlate with loyalty to other remaining manifestations of Sovietization of Ukraine. However, our study has shown that many Russophones don't talk about Soviet heritage at all. This may be particularly true for the specific community we analyzed, but it is still important to note how, in the absence of the categories assigned by researchers, other ones relevant for participants may stand out more prominently. In the current conditions, with both the Russophone and the Ukrainophone identities taking shape, researchers should not make assumptions, but rather allow the participants of the studies to construct their vision of their identity themselves.

And as our reconstruction of the values and ideologies of the community of Ukrainian Russophones has shown, the combination of elements through which they do so can be seemingly incongruent. While they explicitly reject connections with the Russian Federation and its mainstream culture and political narratives as examples of negative attitudes to the Russian Orthodox Church show, they also don't rush to uncritically accept mainstream Ukrainian ones, as the example of the divergent perceptions of the Kharkiv mayor demonstrates.

Conclusion

Ukrainian Russophones are in the process of constructing a new Russophone identity, drawing its boundaries by excluding the Russian speakers of the Russian Federation from their imagined community of Russian speakers. They do so through

[83] V. Kulyk, *Shedding Russianness*, op. cit.

linguistic means by which they construct closer ties within their local Russophone community as well as with the rest of the bilingual Ukrainian and Russian speakers from Ukraine. These means include using local references that can be challenging to discern for outsiders and using hybrid Russian and Ukrainian languages.

That Ukrainian Russophones use the language that excludes monolingual Russian speakers from participating in their communication indicates that they no longer see the latter as part of their Russophone community. This means that Russian Federation is no longer the only undisputable center of a Russian-speaking world and supports the perspective that Russian has become a pluricentric language. Additionally, Ukrainian Russophones differentiate themselves from the Russian speakers of RF by extralinguistic means, such as articulating ideological differences between themselves and the mainstream Russian society. Given that the mainstream Russian state-building narrative is rooted in religious fundamentalism and traditionalism, we can expect that the Ukrainian Russophone identities will continue moving towards the rejection of such fundamentalism and traditionalism. Ukrainian Russophone identities may indeed become a site where new civic identities will emerge in Ukraine.

♢ *Towards World Russians? How Ukrainian Russophones Construct Boundaries from the Russian Federation* ♢

Anna Vozna

Abstract

The article explores how russophone Ukrainians in Kharkiv construct boundaries from the Russian Federation in the Russian language. It relies on Norton's language and identity framework and argues that Ukrainian russophones no longer see Russian speakers from the Russian Federation as part of their imagined community of Russian speakers. It shows that russophones signal the boundaries of their community and exclude Russian speakers from the Russian Federation by using language embedded in local culture, by explicitly articulating the difference of their culture from that of the Russian Federation and through linguistic hybridity which, at the same time, allows them to include bilingual Ukrainians. The research suggests that Ukrainian russophones are in the process of constructing local russophone identities independent from the Russian Federation, meaning that the Russian language is becoming pluricentric.

Keywords

Russophone Identities, Russian as Pluricentric, World Russians, Ukrainian Russophones.

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