Nation-building in post-Soviet Ukraine : educational policy and the response of the Russian-speaking population

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8 CONCLUSION

This research project aimed to delineate the nation-building project in education and the response of the Russians and Russophone Ukrainians in post-Soviet Ukraine. The focus was on nation-building policies as they affect the social-cultural position of national minorities. All states are engaged in nation-building schemes to some extent, deeming them necessary to enhance the unity, legitimacy and, therefore, the stability of the state. But states vary greatly in the scale and depth of these policies. Some states have relatively mild nation-building projects, permitting the national minorities within their borders to freely develop their cultures and languages. Other states, however, seek to ethnically homogenize the country, eliminating groups that have a language, culture and/or identity different from that of the dominant core group. National minorities, in their turn, can respond in a variety of ways to nation-building projects. In extreme cases, they either fully assimilate into the language and culture of the dominant group (and by doing so adopt the identity of this group) or tenaciously cling to their own cultural heritage and identity.

I specifically looked at education as this sphere represents both the most important instrument of nation-building for a state and the prime institution for national minorities to pass their language and culture on to the next generation. Ukraine was chosen for its large Russian minority (22.1% of Ukraine's total population of 52 million) which is disproportionately living in the eastern and southern parts of the country, and for the many members of the titular nation who speak Russian as their first language (the so-called Russian-speaking Ukrainians). The resulting intricate mosaic of nationality and language groups complicates the implementation of the nation-building project and makes Ukraine a fascinating case to study.

This concluding chapter will discuss the answers to the research questions that were formulated in the opening chapter.

8.1 How does the current nation-building project in the educational sphere compare to that in Soviet times?

The language component of the Soviet nation-building policy was highly variable. In the first decade of its existence, the Soviet Union stimulated the use of minority languages in order to remove the social and economic arrears of the non-Russian peoples vis-a-vis the Russians as the dominant nationality. In Soviet Ukraine this meant that the titular language became the main medium of instruction in the schools and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in higher education. In addition, Ukrainian was made the compulsory language of the republican administration and applicants for jobs in the state and party apparatus had to show a certain level of proficiency in it. The 1930s witnessed a complete turnaround in the Soviet nationalities policy. Stalin began persecuting state and party officials who had participated in the campaign to elevate the titular languages. Russian was reintroduced as the language of instruction in Ukraine's institutes of higher education, and the Russian language and literature became compulsory subjects in all schools in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. Russification continued in the post-war years. The Khrushchev decree of
the late 1950s which granted parents the right to choose the language of instruction of their children had the intended effect of encouraging many Ukrainian parents to send their children to Russian schools. Consequently, the proportion of Russian-instructed schoolchildren grew from 26.3% in 1955-56 to 47.0% in 1989-90, and the proportion of Ukrainian-instructed pupils conversely declined from 72.8% in 1955-56 to 47.5% in 1989-90.

When Glasnost' finally became well entrenched in Ukraine, the newly empowered titular elite once again accorded primacy to the Ukrainian language. In education, the change was embodied in the 1989 Law on Languages which granted institutions of higher education a period of ten years to switch to Ukrainian as the medium of instruction, and obliged students applying for admission to an institute of higher education to do a Ukrainian language and literature exam. After independence, measures further restricting the use of Russian in the education system soon followed. Educational authorities, for instance, decreed that the network of pupils (i.e. the distribution of Ukrainian- and Russian-instructed pupils) should be brought into optimal accordance with the national composition of the local population. Since the proportion of Ukrainian-taught pupils lagged far behind the percentage of ethnic Ukrainians in the local population in all the oblasts of the east and south, this decree truly foresaw a massive ukrainianization of the school network in these Russian-speaking regions. Another ministerial decree made the Russian language an optional subject for Ukrainian schools whilst including Russian literature in the new course of world literature. This decree plainly violated the Article in the Law on Languages that declared the Ukrainian language and the Russian language to be compulsory subjects in all schools. Yet another measure deprived Russian schools of the possibility to apply for and obtain prestigious titles like lyceum, gymnasiu m or college. The 1996 Constitution finalized the unequal standing of languages by declaring Ukrainian to be the sole state language whilst granting Russian the status of a national minority language.

Not only was the new educational regime restrictive in terms of language regulations, it did not entrust Russians and other minorities with much autonomy in determining the subject matter either. School education remained as centralized as before, with schools being required to follow the national curriculum designed for each type of school, work according to the programs developed by the Ministry of Education, and use its 'recommended' textbooks. These regulations, moreover, applied to all schools, i.e. irrespective of the form of ownership (state-sponsored or private) or language of instruction (Ukrainian or Russian). Nonetheless, some changes could be noted. After independence, teachers could state their opinions freely, and it was left to them to decide which additional materials to use in lessons. The number of free hours increased more than fourfold, and schools and individual pupils could choose from a whole series of new subjects how to spend these hours. One of these subjects was Рiдний Край (home region), which acquainted pupils with the culture and history of their own region by means of programs and educational materials prepared by the teacher of the subject him/herself. Compared to schools, institutions of higher education (вуzy) were granted much more autonomy in post-Soviet Ukraine. Although they were required to teach a block of humanitarian disciplines, which replaced a number of disciplines associated with the communist past, вуzy were free to determine the subject matter of these disciplines (i.e.
by creating their own programs and teaching materials). As this was unthinkable in the Soviet past, independence did constitute a major change for institutes of higher education.

After independence the educational powers had the school subjects of the history of Ukraine, Ukrainian literature and the geography of Ukraine at their disposal to disseminate the Ukrainian national idea. Not only are the three courses compulsory subjects in all schools, the students of the 11th grade also have to do a compulsory central exam in the history of Ukraine and Ukrainian literature. The post-Soviet history of Ukraine course clearly advances the Hrushevskyi scheme of Ukrainian history, i.e. a version of history that maximizes Ukrainian distinctiveness vis-à-vis Russia. (The famous historian Hrushevskyi is cherished for providing the Ukrainian nation with a distinct past.) Thus, the medieval empire of Kyivan Rus’ is depicted as an early form of Ukrainian statehood, and not as the precursor of the Russian Empire. Similarly, the Cossacks of the 17th century are portrayed as Ukrainian freedom fighters eager to establish an independent state, and not as warriors wishing to unite with ‘big brother’ Russia. To further underline Ukrainian individuality, the new course presents Ukrainian as the sole native language and describes the Bolshevik Revolution as a foreign phenomenon in which Ukrainians took no part. Moreover, the OUN, the nationalist militia from western Ukraine which fought both the Soviets and the Germans in World War II, is characterized as a genuine national liberation movement.

Surprisingly, the post-Soviet course on Ukrainian literature is much less politicized than its Soviet predecessor. Most of the works the new program briefly discusses have no ideological or nationalizing content. Moreover, the new Ukrainian literature course introduces remarkably few works critical of the Soviet regime. In this, the new Ukrainian literature teaching strongly contrasts with the new history of Ukraine teaching. Whereas the content of the history of Ukraine course was completely revised in order to discredit the Soviet scheme of history, the content of the Ukrainian literature course was largely left untouched. The revised geography of Ukraine course does not contribute much to the nation-building project either. It is telling, for instance, that the new geography textbook does not rely on typical geographical features, such as natural borders or settlement patterns of ethnic Ukrainians, as elements that differentiate Ukraine from Russia and that thus legitimize Ukraine’s independence. The national authorities therefore clearly concentrate on the history of Ukraine as the subject intended to arouse national fervor in schoolchildren.

8.2 How can the current nation-building policies be explained?

In view of the restrictive language regulations and the unified constrained nature of the education system, it is tempting to label post-Soviet Ukraine as a nationalizing state that seeks to allocate the spoils of independence to the dominant titular group and eliminate cultural diversity. This, however, would be a serious misrepresentation of reality. First of all, the newly empowered elite consciously sought to include Russians and other minorities by offering citizenship to all persons resident on Ukrainian territory. Second, non-Ukrainians were not systematically purged from state offices, nor did they face serious discrimination in the job market (western Ukraine to some extent being the
exception). Third, specific legislation (notably the Law on National Minorities) granted ethnic minorities extensive rights. Fourth, by accepting that the language regulations were implemented only gradually and certain targets could not be met (see next section), the national authorities showed consideration for Ukraine’s linguistic profile. Ukraine’s overall strategy in dealing with ethnic pluralism can therefore best be characterized as one that is fairly liberal/permisssive with a mild but nonetheless incessant drive to culturally homogenize the country.

The choice for an accommodating strategy is surprising given that Ukraine meets only one of the six conditions that Lijphart holds to be conducive to consociational democracy, a political arrangement that can be regarded as a special kind of accommodating strategy. Lijphart’s conditions may thus only have illuminative value for this specific type of accommodating policy and not for liberal policies in general. Ukraine, on the other hand, satisfies three of the seven qualifications which in Hennayake’s view contribute to the establishment of a strategy of domination or control. The question is thus how Ukraine’s unexpected choice for an accommodating approach can be explained.

According to Chinn and Kaiser, the differences in minority policy between the post-Soviet states can essentially be accounted for by three factors: early mass-based national consciousness; a history of independence; and demographic trends. They argue that post-Soviet nationalist elites succeeded in establishing exclusionary policies in states where the titular population had already acquired a national consciousness by the beginning of the 20th century. This argument indeed applies for Ukraine. The absence of a Ukrainian middle class and repressive Czard policies prevented the national idea from spreading among the peasantry in Russian-held Ukraine before the 1917 Revolution. Only in Austrian-ruled western Ukraine did the Ukrainian national movement flourish. After independence the pattern laid down in the first decades of the 20th century resurfaced. The nationalist movement could merely count on the support of western Ukrainians and the residents of Kyiv, which was not enough to become the dominant political force and change minority policy in an exclusionary direction. Hence, Ukrainian nationalism is labeled a “minority faith” by Andrew Wilson.

The absence of a history of independence only added to the weakness of the nationalist cause. Because Ukraine had not experienced a period of relatively recent state independence ‘illegally eliminated by the Soviet regime,’ the nationalist claim that a ‘historical injustice’ had to be rectified lacked persuasiveness. This undermined the legitimacy of an exclusionary strategy. To put it differently, the Ukrainian elite could not exploit a ‘wounded pride’ syndrome, unlike the titular elites in the Baltic States who capitalized the public indignation about the Soviet occupation of 1939.

Chinn and Kaiser hold a steady decline in the relative numbers of titulars vis-à-vis non-titulars (i.e. demographic trends) to be the third risk factor encouraging indigenous elites to opt for restrictive policies. Though generally valid for the post-Soviet context, this regularity cannot be observed for Ukraine. Despite the ‘threat’ to the Ukrainian nation that Russian in-migration and the significant russification of Ukrainians constituted after World War II, post-Soviet Ukraine has not embarked on a policy of exclusion.
8.3 To what extent have educational authorities succeeded in implementing the nation-building project in the various regions?

As regards language politics, we have seen that the national authorities formulated ambitious policy goals after independence. For schools, the objective was to make the proportion of Ukrainian-instructed pupils correspond to the proportion of Ukrainians in the population. As the percentage of Ukrainian-taught pupils still fell 23.4% short of the Ukrainian element in the population (the 1989 census listed 72.7% of Ukraine’s population as Ukrainians) at the time of independence, this objective, which was first stated in February 1991, anticipated a substantial ukrainianization of the school network. After independence the government was determined to elevate the status of Ukrainian and make it the sole or at least the dominant language in all public spheres. Specifying the aforementioned objective, the Ministry of Education decreed in October 1992 that the network of first graders studying in Ukrainian should be brought in line with the national composition of the population in each region by 1 September 1993. By focusing on the first grade instead of on all pupils, the national authorities indicated that they favored a gradual approach, permitting those children already enrolled in Russian classes to continue their Russian-language education.

Interestingly, this decree was hard to reconcile with the clause in the 1989 Language Law which granted parents the right to choose the language of instruction of their children. This discrepancy between the two stipulations has led some observers to postulate that the national authorities may have assumed that parents’ preferences concerning the language of education would automatically coincide with their ethnicity (Arel, 1995a; Jackson, 1998). Yet, to make doubly sure that a maximum number of Ukrainians would enroll their children in Ukrainian schools, the Ministry of Education took several measures to make Ukrainian-language education more appealing than Russian-language instruction. One of these measures sanctioned the opening of small (and therefore attractive) Ukrainian classes in Russian schools, whilst not providing for the reverse case, i.e. the opening of (small) Russian classes in Ukrainian schools. Another one established the previously mentioned Ukrainian-language entrance exam for higher education. Yet another measure proclaimed, as we have seen, that prestigious school types, like lyceums, gymnasiaums and colleges, should as a rule be opened with Ukrainian as the language of instruction.

The policy aim for higher education was particularly strict: institutions of higher education would have to switch to Ukrainian as the medium of instruction within ten years. Given that Russian had come to dominate higher education almost completely in post-war Soviet Ukraine (in 1992-93 still only 36.8% of all students were instructed in Ukrainian), the task these institutions of higher education had to fulfill was truly formidable.

What then was the effect of these measures? Have the national authorities been successful in achieving their goals? For schools it can be observed that, despite considerable progress in reaching the aforementioned policy objective, the proportion of Ukrainian-instructed pupils was still some 10 percentage points short of the proportion of Ukrainians in the population in 1997-98. Most remarkable, however, was the enormous regional variation in the percentage of Ukrainian-instructed schoolchildren. In the western
oblasts and in most oblasts of the center, where Ukrainian-language education had traditionally been strong, this percentage equaled or even exceeded the share of Ukrainians in the oblast population. In the Russian-speaking oblasts of the east and south, by contrast, the percentage trailed behind the Ukrainian segment in the population. Within the Russian-speaking regions marked differences could be found between oblasts where Ukrainians make up a sizeable majority of the population and oblasts where Ukrainians constitute a small majority or a minority of the population. The former recorded steep increases in the percentage of Ukrainian-instructed pupils to the point that this percentage was well on the way to reaching the Ukrainian element in the population (i.e. the oblasts of Dnipropetrovs’k, Kherson and Mykolaiv). The latter, in contrast, showed only minimal growth figures (i.e. the oblasts of Donets’k and Luhans’k and the autonomous republic of The Crimea). As it is precisely in the latter oblasts that the gap between the proportion of Ukrainian-taught pupils and the Ukrainian element in the population was widest, one could argue that in those oblasts where ukrainianization was urgently needed from a policy perspective it failed to make substantial inroads on Russian-language school education.

For data on first graders, the oblasts of the east and south show nearly the same pattern as for the all grades combined data. Once more it is the oblasts of Dnipropetrovs’k, Kherson and Mykolaiv that came close to realizing the October 1992 decree: in the 1993-94 school year the local authorities in these oblasts established networks of first graders that nearly corresponded to the national composition of the local population. In the other oblasts the local administrations were not able to execute the October 1992 decree. Some formed networks of Ukrainian-instructed first graders that lagged moderately behind the Ukrainian segment in the population (i.e. the oblasts of Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Odesa), while others created networks that were still remote from the demographic weight of the Ukrainians (i.e. Donets’k and Luhans’k oblast and The Crimean).

For institutes of higher education it was clearly impossible to meet the requirement of the Language Law and totally switch to Ukrainian-language instruction by the end of the decade. Nonetheless considerable headway was made: the proportion of Ukrainian-instructed students nationwide rose from 36.8% in 1992-93 to 51.2% in 1995-96. The same regional divide could be observed as in schools. While in the western oblasts nearly 100% of the students were studying in Ukrainian by 1995-96, only a minority of the students were doing so in the oblasts of the east and south. Donets’k, Luhans’k and The Crimea once more stand out due to their low numbers of Ukrainian-instructed students (7.5%, 8.4% and 0% respectively). More recent data on the percentage of Ukrainian-instructed academic groups lend further support to the observation that vuzy would not be able to comply with the Language Law stipulation: in 1997-98 still only 57% of academic groups in state universities and 38.6% of these groups in polytechnical universities were instructed in Ukrainian.

Several reasons can be cited for the failure of the national authorities to bring the network of schools in concordance with the national composition of the population. One of these concerns the autonomous conduct of local state administrations. It can be argued that the absence of a law-abiding tradition in conjunction with the system of elected mayors only reinforced the impact of the local state on the policy outcome. The shortage
of Ukrainian teaching materials and a scarcity of teachers able to conduct lessons in Ukrainian can be seen as another factor frustrating the policy objectives of the central government. Lastly, the choice behavior of parents surely is an important determinant shaping the mosaic of schools. The incomplete implementation of the Language Law stipulation on higher education is largely a function of the material base—i.e. of the availability of lecturers having a sufficient command of Ukrainian and the presence of Ukrainian-language teaching materials. The constraints in this sphere forced the Ministry of Education to content itself with a much slower pace of ukrainianization in higher education.

Dissemination of the new textbooks and programs to the farthest corners of the country appears to have largely been completed, as I found all the schools I visited in the four cities using the new teaching materials. This suggests that the imposition of new subject matter in the school system has been a much greater success than the observance of the language regulations. An education official told me that even in The Crimea, the hotbed of Russian nationalism, the schools began to work with the Kyiv-prepared curricula, programs and textbooks from 1 September 1997 onwards. A personal check in some of the schools in Simferopol, the capital of The Crimea, revealed that these schools were indeed using the new textbooks for the history of Ukraine course, the crucial subject for nation-building purposes. The consolidation of the state regarding the uniform instruction of revised subject matter is remarkable since one would expect the current severe economic crisis to deprive the state of the necessary means to fulfill its state and nation-building program.

The triumph of the central state regarding the preparation and distribution of new textbooks, programs and curricula thus contrasts markedly with the piecemeal implementation of the central language policy. Whether the discrepancy between these two levers of nation-building was unintentional or consciously planned remains unclear. Naturally, switching the language of instruction requires a much greater effort from teachers than teaching a revised thematic content of humanitarian courses in the same language. From this point of view, the discrepancy is likely to be unintentional as it emanates from the constraints set by the material base (i.e. the shortage of teachers qualified to teach in Ukrainian). Yet, there is some evidence that the national authorities at least foresaw the differential success of the two sides to the nation-building project. For instance, I found many schools using official Russian translations of the new history textbooks, which can hardly be called compatible with the campaign to ukrainianize the school system. Clearly, this suggests that the absorption by pupils of a new version of history, geography and literature had absolute priority for the central policy makers, so much so that these officials were willing to compromise over the language issue.

The successful spread of the new history of Ukraine textbooks in Russian-speaking southern and eastern Ukraine is all the more remarkable given that the authors of the new books presented the Hrushevs’kyi version of Ukrainian history. This particular version of history firmly upholds the claim of Ukrainian distinctiveness vis-à-vis Russia, and runs the risk of alienating - and thus being rejected by - both Russian speakers and people with a longing for the Soviet past, such as the Red Army veterans.
8.4 What has been the role of local state administrations in the nation-building program?

After independence, local educational offices had a profound impact on central policy. Differences between the cities in local policy primarily resulted from the persons in charge of the education departments. Thus, in the city of Donets’k a continuity of personnel from the Soviet era meant that pressure from Kyïv to ukrainianize the local school system was effectively resisted. As a result, by 1997-98 still only 10.1% of Donets’k’s first graders were being taught in Ukrainian, a figure that trails far behind the 39.4% of Ukrainians in the Donets’k population. In Odesa, by contrast, the appointment of Serhii Kozyts’kyi, a strong supporter of Rukh, as Head of the Department of Education of the Odesa city administration, signaled a surge of ukrainianization. During his term of office, the number of Ukrainian schools jumped from 16 in 1995-96 to 51 in 1997-98 out of a total of 133 schools. Likewise, the percentage of Ukrainian-instructed pupils rose from 8% in 1991-92 to 39% in 1997-98, just ten percentage points short of the Ukrainian element in the population.

In L’viv and Kyïv, the other two cities in this research project, the local educational offices so zealously embraced national language policy that they contributed to a situation in which the percentage of Ukrainian-instructed first graders actually exceeded the share of Ukrainians in the population (in L’viv the former stood at 93.7% in 1997-98 compared to a 79.1% Ukrainian presence in the population; in Kyïv the figures were 94.0% and 75.4% respectively). In nationally conscious L’viv, radical local policy found its inception in the Rukh victory in the city soviet elections of March 1990. Once in power, Rukh began replacing Soviet-style apparatchiks in state institutions with their own nationalist-leaning candidates. In Kyïv the change in local policy seems to have been prepared by the national authorities as it was the Kravchuk-appointed Mayor Ivan Salyi who initiated the ukrainianization of the Kyïv school network in May 1992.

Education departments used different strategies to ukrainianize the school system. In L’viv indications were found of the local authorities firing school directors who did not bow to pressure and open Ukrainian classes, and substituting these directors with more malleable persons. By contrast, in Kyïv the vast majority of Russian school directors were simply instructed to change the status of their schools by decree of the mayor. In both Kyïv and Odesa, (but not in L’viv!) school directors were told that they could not open Russian classes parallel to Ukrainian ones. Consequently, many former Russian schools found themselves in a transition period with the need to become fully Ukrainian within ten years.

8.5 How do the local Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians respond linguistically to the current nation-building policies in education?

Our survey among schoolchildren in the cities of Donets’k, Odesa, Kyïv and L’viv revealed that Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians exhibit marked regional variations in their linguistic responses. In Donets’k and Odesa, only negligible numbers of Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians raise their children in Ukrainian and enroll
their children in Ukrainian schools (as reported by these children). In addition, their children’s use of Ukrainian in private settings and their consumption of Ukrainian media remains marginal. In these cities, therefore, the response of the Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians is clearly one of language retention. In Kyïv, Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians are sending their offspring to Ukrainian schools in increasingly larger numbers, but they do not speak much Ukrainian to their children (yet). These children’s own linguistic conduct resembles that of their parents. Thus, in Kyïv Russians and Russophone Ukrainians may be said to show the response of language integration.

In L’viv a sharp contrast can be found within the Russian community, between Russians in mixed couples and those in purely Russian families. The former are now enrolling their children in Ukrainian classes in increasingly larger majorities and a substantial number are raising their children exclusively in Ukrainian. Their children now lean towards Ukrainian: on three of the four indicators measuring the linguistic behavior of the child, they answered Ukrainian in large majorities. The Russian parents, on the contrary, appear to reject Ukrainian-language education and make no effort to speak to their children in Ukrainian. The behavior of their children is ambivalent. On the one hand, they claim to watch Ukrainian television and speak both languages to their friends in large numbers, but on the other hand, they reported not reading any Ukrainian books or speaking much Ukrainian during breaks at school. In L’viv, therefore, the Russians in mixed families can be said to show the response of assimilation, while the Russians in purely Russian couples seem to opt for language retention (though the behavior of their children is somewhat equivocal). Russophone Ukrainians closely follow the purely Russian families in their linguistic conduct. Unlike the latter, however, they enroll their children in Ukrainian schools in large numbers. Thus, Russian-speaking Ukrainians may be said to exhibit the response of language integration in L’viv.

8.6 How can the pattern of responses of the Russian-speaking population be explained?

The pattern of responses is clearly related to the ethnic proportion variable. The responses of the Russophone population generally move up the scale (i.e. from language retention to assimilation) as their percentage in the local population diminishes (from 75.7% in Donets’k to 18.6% in L’viv). Likewise, the nature of local policy is helpful in understanding the set of responses. As policy shifts from restrictive (L’viv and Kyïv) to accommodating (Donets’k), the response moves from assimilation to language retention. The direction of this correlation supports the ‘opportunity’ conception of the effect of policy. National minorities will increasingly see no other option but to reconcile themselves with majority rule, as the state constrains opportunities for groups to express themselves culturally. Unfortunately, due to the particular choice of cities, it cannot be determined which of these two variables has the upper hand in explaining the responses, as the variation of the one keeps pace with that of the other over the four cities in this research.

The mixed marriages variable also provides important explanation because the responses of mixed families lean more towards the assimilation end of the scale than
those of purely Russian couples in all four cities. There appears to be a combined effect of mixed marriages with the proportion of Russians because the difference between the response of the mixed couples and that of the Russian couples increases as the proportion of Russians in a city decreases.

The purely Russian couples in L’viv demonstrate a response (language retention) that would not be foreseen by the ethnic proportion and local policy propositions. At first sight, the ethnic schism hypothesis, which assumes that the more a minority group differs on cultural markers from the dominant group the tighter the minority group will cling to its language, holds the key to explaining the surprising behavior of this group. After all, the cultural difference between Russians and Ukrainians is larger in L’viv than in any of the other three cities in this research. Yet, in the context of substantial cultural differentiation one would not expect the Russians in mixed couples to assimilate, nor to find so many mixed marriages between Russians and western Ukrainians in the first place. In similar vein, the language integration of the Russophone Ukrainians in L’viv is left unaccounted for. Thus, it is doubtful whether ethnic schism has any interpretative value at all.

The unexpected response of the Russian parents in L’viv seems, instead, to be related to a concern for the preservation of their language and culture. It can be argued that the aversion of these Russians to enrolling their children in Ukrainian classes and to speaking Ukrainian to them emanates from a fear that, in the totally Ukrainian-speaking environment of L’viv, Ukrainian-language education would influence the language use of the child in private settings, making the child lose his or her Russian roots. In the other three cities, in contrast, Russians need not be alarmed at Ukrainian-language education ‘ukrainizing’ their offspring due to the Russian-speaking character of these cities.

To test this proposition, a small follow-up survey was done among Russian parents. The results of this survey confirmed the hypothesis: Russian parents in L’viv indeed appear to be primarily motivated by a wish to preserve their own language and culture regarding school choice, while Russian parents in Kyiv and Odesa seem to have other considerations for sending their children to Russian schools. Data on the cultural self-organization of Russians lent further support to the claim that the Russians in L’viv are very much involved in safeguarding their language and identity. No fewer than nine Russian cultural societies are active in the L’viv oblast, seven of which coordinate their activities in weekly meetings. In none of the other cities are Russians as well organized culturally.

It must be noted that the scope of the concern for cultural preservation account cannot be fully assessed by means of the present choice of cities, nor the relation of this factor to the other independent variables. It can assuredly be stated, however, that anxieties over language and identity among Russians seem first and foremost to apply in a context where their relative numbers are small (ethnic proportion), and not in a context of pronounced cultural differentiation with the majority group (ethnic schism). Interestingly, our research data suggest that an environment, such as the city of L’viv, where the Russian language and culture are indeed (perceived to be) under threat has caused the local Russian community to split into a group opting for assimilation (the Russians in mixed Russian-Ukrainian families) and a group ever more tenaciously clinging to their language and culture (the Russians of purely Russian couples).
8.7 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this research project have a number of important implications. The first is that as the relative number of a minority group in the population of a given area decreases, more members of this group will opt for assimilation. However, this correlation seems to hold up only to a certain point. Beyond this point, i.e. in an environment where the numerical strength of a minority group becomes so weak that its language and culture are (perceived to be) threatened with extinction, the group splits in two with one segment settling on assimilation and the other frenetically retaining its identity.

The validity of the first part of the generalization is confirmed by Laitin’s research on the identity trajectories of the “beached” Russian diaspora in Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In his survey, he found that the size of the titular population in the respondents’ city of residence was the only coefficient statistically significant for all four republics, with Russians displaying a more positive stance towards assimilation as their relative number diminishes vis-à-vis the titular nation (Laitin, 1998). Hin (1999) observed a similar regularity among the Armenian minority in post-Soviet Georgia. In the Signagi region, where Armenians make up a meager 8% of the overwhelmingly Georgian population, Armenians reported to be thinking mostly in Georgian, while those in Javacheti, a homogeneously Armenian region, claimed to be thinking only in Armenian. Interestingly, the political response of ethnic minorities can correlate in much the same way with ethnic proportion as their cultural response. Comparing predominantly Swedish Ostrobothnia to the more ethnically mixed Uusimaa in Finland at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, Hämäläinen (1966) found that the Swedish speakers of the former had more radical political demands than the latter. This suggests that the cultural and the political dimensions of minority group responses are strongly interrelated after all, which once again undermines the validity of Kolstoe’s two-dimensional model (see previous chapter).

The second part of the generalization, i.e. the phenomenon of a (part of a) small minority group which, aware of its cultural fragility, fervently protects its cultural heritage, has received much academic attention in the context of diaspora studies. These studies have demonstrated how diaspora communities maintain their cultural assets and group boundaries, and keep alive a collective memory of their original homeland, despite being cut off from it by several generations in time and by thousands of kilometers in space. In fact, it is these features that scholars think of as the very defining elements of a diaspora, distinguishing a diaspora from other migrant communities (e.g. Safran 1991; Chaliand and Rageau, 1995; Laitin, 1998; Wahlbeck, 1999). However, to my knowledge, there are no academic studies citing the mechanism of a minority group being more prone to disintegration (with one segment rejecting assimilation) as the demographic weight of this group decreases. Possibly, therefore, the survey results of L’viv present a unique finding.

And yet it must be remembered that the particular language climate in L’viv may have played an important role in shaping the linguistic responses. Day-to-day interaction with Ukrainian speakers has more than likely made the L’vivans feel different and see themselves as a distinct minority or diaspora group (let us not forget that the
Russians in L’viv constitute a recently established immigrant community. By contrast, the Russians in Kyiv, though comprising only a slightly larger minority than the Russians in L’viv, are not likely to see themselves as any different from the titular majority due to the prevailing use of Russian as the language on the streets and at work. Thus, it may very well be language climate and not so much the ethnic proportion that explains why the Russians in L’viv and Kyiv behave so differently.

Of course, language climate and ethnic proportion are strongly interrelated: the smaller the percentage of Russians in the local population, the less these Russians have left their mark on the language pattern in a given city. Yet, this language pattern has been influenced by other factors as well. As the introduction mentioned, diverging historical experiences explain why the Ukrainian language has retained its dominant position in western Ukraine, while Russian has pushed Ukrainian ever further into the countryside in other parts of the country. To assess which of the two variables, language climate or ethnic proportion, can best account for cases of minority groups splitting into assimilating and non-assimilating parts, it would be necessary to determine the response of the Russians in oblast centers such as Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr and Chernihiv. The Russians there constitute the same proportion in the local population as in L’viv, but the language patterns in these cities differ from that of L’viv. It would, moreover, be interesting to examine the linguistic conduct of the Ukrainian minority in The Crimea as this group finds itself in a situation similar to that of the Russians in L’viv. If the same patterns were observed among this group as among the L’vivian Russians, then our previously mentioned conclusion would surely have predictive value.

Another important finding of this research is that the role of the (local) state indeed matters. It would appear that the opportunity interpretation has superior explanatory power: the more restrictive local policy is towards a minority language, the more a minority group is prone to seek language integration or assimilation into the language of the titular group. This mechanism was particularly well illustrated by the case of Odessa. There, due to the efforts of the man in charge of the local educational office, the proportion of pupils instructed in Ukrainian jumped from 8% in 1991-92 to 39% in 1997-98. There is much evidence outside the Ukrainian context to substantiate the opportunity understanding of state approaches to multi-ethnicity. For instance, in Laitin’s four-country study, Russian speakers had the highest scores on the openness to assimilation index in Latvia and Estonia where the policy towards the Russian speakers was most exclusionary (Laitin, 1998). Similarly, citing the Belgian and Scottish cases, Rudolph and Thompson (1985) argued that accommodating devices did not lead to an abatement of ethnoterritorial sentiment there, although they did undercut support for nationalist parties. Likewise, Coakley (1992) contends that all-union arrangements to soothe the ethnonational demands of one group unintentionally stimulated those of groups whose members had hitherto acquired only a weak national consciousness, or none at all. (He mentions Soviet Belorussians and Yugoslav Macedonians as examples.)

And yet, the grievance interpretation of the role of the local state was given some credence by the protests that the restrictive policies in Kyiv and L’viv elicited. In L’viv

147 Russian can be expected to play a more prominent role in these cities than in L’viv as the percentage of Ukrainians stating Russian to be their mother tongue was much higher there than in L’viv. See Arel (1994).
the local Russian community has organized itself in several cultural societies, the leaders of which accused the local educational authority of pressurizing Russian school directors to open Ukrainian classes under penalty of dismissal. In Kyiv one Russian cultural association regularly organized demonstrations in front of the city hall to protest against the closing of Russian schools. However, these opposition groups have never evolved into a mass-based protest movement (the demonstrations in Kyiv, for example, never attracted more than about 25 people), handicapped as they were by internal strife and insufficient skills and financial resources to set up a professional organization (above all those in Kyiv). Thus, as a whole the Russian (-speaking) counter movement to restrictive policies remained a marginal phenomenon, making the grievance interpretation of little value.

Still, the grievance line of reasoning may have some interpretative power in the context of southern and eastern Ukraine. There, the absence of organized protest could well be related to the hesitant and incomplete implementation of the nation-building project (as we have seen, higher education in Odesa and Donets’k was most resistant to central regulations). It is thus not inconceivable that a cultural mobilization among southern and eastern Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians would have occurred if nation-building policies had been pursued more vigorously. The lack of opposition in the aforementioned regions may, alternatively, be explained by the severe economic crisis. In conditions of material deprivation, the most people are likely to place matters of a more immaterial nature (such as anxieties over cultural survival) at the bottom of the agenda. This, in turn, can be expected to greatly handicap opposition movements agitating against nation-building objectives that have been realized (such as the establishment in Odesa of a network of schools that corresponds to the national composition of the population). Following this logic, one would expect the Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians to start mobilizing on cultural matters as soon as the economy picks up. In a context of economic prosperity, the grievance model might, therefore, have explanatory power after all. However, this presumption is not borne out by Laitin’s empirical evidence: Estonia and Latvia, the countries showing the highest openness to assimilation scores among Russian speakers, not only have the most restrictive policies but also the best performing economies of the four countries under study.

Chapter Two posed two questions that lead to two other important implications of this study. These questions were (1) whether the amorphous national identity of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians and (to a lesser extent) Russians somehow predisposes these groups to assimilation, and (2) whether it is at all appropriate to make a distinction between Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Russians. The answer to the former is succinct: judging from the linguistic responses of both groups, a weak national identity does not impel them to assimilate to the titular language and culture. On the contrary, in the regions where “ethnic marginality” among Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians is said to be strongest (see once more Pirie, 1996), i.e. in the south and east, they retain their language in massive numbers. Instead, it appears to be their demographic weight (and consequently the language environment of a given area) that to a large extent determines their linguistic response in the place of residence.

Using the linguistic conduct of the Russians and Russophone Ukrainians as a yardstick to assess the validity of distinguishing between the two groups provides an
intriguing answer to the second question. Proceeding from our survey results, it would seem that such a distinction is only justifiable in a context where the Russian language and culture are (perceived to be) in danger of disappearing. After all, it is only in L'viv that marked differences were found between Russophone Ukrainians (language integration) and Russians (one section showing assimilation, the other language retention). In the other three cities in this research project the two groups responded in an equal manner.

Does the observation that nationality only seems to matter in the west-Ukrainian context mean that language is the more important social cleavage in the other parts of the country, i.e. that Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians should be grouped together to clearly distinguish them from Ukrainian speakers? Looking exclusively at the linguistic response of both groups would seem too narrow a base from which to answer this question in the affirmative. Indeed, Chapter Two cited a study that found not language, but nationality, religion and region to be the significant factors determining political attitudes in Ukraine. In similar vein, Kuzio has recently argued that political ideology (pro- or anti-communist) and generation are at least as important cleavages as language, substantiating his claim by pointing out that there is currently no “ethnic” political party specifically promoting the interests of Russian speakers (Kuzio, 1999a). Others, however, insist that language is a weighty determinant of political attitudes and an identity marker of growing importance. Using representative survey data collected by KIIS in May-June 1994, Arel and Khmelko (1996) noted that Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians differed significantly in their opinions on language status, the status of Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia and the CIS, disarmament, political freedom and private property. They observed that the territorial split, evident in the 1994 presidential elections, perfectly matches the uneven spread of language groups, while it appears unrelated to attitudes on market reform which are not regionally polarized. Laitin (1998) also observed that the use of the term “Russian-speaking population” in Ukraine’s media increased from 1994 to 1996, suggesting that a new Russian-speaking identity is in the making. Given all this contradictory evidence, further research is required to determine whether language has indeed become the most important dividing factor or whether other identities have assumed more salience.

8.8 Future Scenarios

A most intriguing question is whether Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians will assimilate into the Ukrainian language and culture in the long run, provided that Ukraine retains its independence and that the current language policy of mild but determined ukrainianization is continued. If one understands the three linguistic responses in this study as stages in a process leading to full assimilation, or as trajectories along which Russians and Russian speakers are moving towards full assimilation at different speeds, one would certainly expect them to.

The evidence of this survey suggests that there is indeed a trend towards assimilation among (many) Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians. This could most clearly be seen in the domain of school choice. A comparison of the 1994-95 cohort of
pupils with that of 1990-91 revealed that Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians were enrolling their children in Ukrainian schools in increasingly larger numbers across the board. This growth was spectacular in Kyiv and L’viv, small to moderate in Odesa and minimal in Donets’k. The only group that demonstrated an actual decline in the relative number of parents sending their children to Ukrainian schools was the group of purely Russian parents in L’viv. The results of the survey are upheld by official statistics on the language of instruction of schoolchildren (which are not broken down by parental nationality or the language spoken at home). These data show an unabated growth of Ukrainian-language education during Kuchma’s term of office. When the 1994-95 and 1997-98 cohorts are compared, the proportion of Ukrainian-instructed pupils jumps from 91.0% to 94.0% in L’viv, from 90.7% to 94.2% in Kyiv, from 15.8% to 39.5% in Odesa, and from 3.8% to 10.1% in Donets’k.

However, the actual use of Ukrainian by Russians and Russophone Ukrainians to their children was still minimal in all four cities. Only the Russians in mixed couples in L’viv were found to speak Ukrainian to their offspring in substantial numbers. Nonetheless, something of a change could be noted in the Ukrainian-instructed group of pupils: relatively more mixed couples and Russophone Ukrainians spoke Ukrainian to their children in the 1994-95 cohort than in the 1990-91 group. In Russophone Donets’k, of all places, this trend was most pronounced.

Compared to their parents, the children themselves were found to speak much more Ukrainian (although there was evidence that the reverse applied for children with Ukrainian parents who spoke both languages to each other). The context, however, appeared to be important: in thoroughly Ukrainian-speaking L’viv a substantial number of children at Russian schools indicated that they spoke both languages to their friends (percentages as high as 60 and 70%). In the other three cities the school environment seemed to make the difference: the children who studied in Ukrainian schools reported to be speaking only Ukrainian (Kyiv) or both languages (Odesa and Donets’k) during breaks in much higher numbers than those who studied in Russian schools. Likewise, the consumption of Ukrainian-language television and books was much higher among Ukrainian-instructed pupils than among Russian-instructed children. One has to be cautious, though, in attributing these findings solely to the language of instruction as Ukrainian-instructed children may have come from more Ukrainian-minded families from the start (where much more Ukrainian is spoken at home) than Russian-instructed pupils. Generally speaking the conclusion seems warranted that the process of switching languages from Russian to Ukrainian has indeed started in schools. Moreover, even in the private setting of the family a minimal but nonetheless perceptible change can be seen. Although the pace of this process varies widely across the country, there is a general transition to Ukrainian, also in thoroughly Russian-speaking Odesa and Donets’k.

The question that surfaces now is whether Russians and Russophone Ukrainians will allow the language switch to happen inside their homes. The results from L’viv, where pressure from the Ukrainian-speaking environment is strong, suggest that Russophone Ukrainians will permit their children to speak Ukrainian at home and will take for granted the fact that their children will gradually lose their ability to speak Russian. Russians seem to be split on this issue. The majority and most notably those in mixed marriages not only accept but even appear to encourage the full assimilation of
their children, while a substantial minority, principally those in purely Russian couples, would seem to reject the idea of their children losing their Russian cultural roots and adopting a Ukrainian identity instead. The size of this minority suggests that the number of Russians resisting assimilation is definitely greater than the few "half-forgotten poets and lonely philologists," whom Laitin regards as the sole members of a community holding onto "languages and rituals in desuetude" (ibid. p. 30). Yet, with the passing of generations their numbers can be expected to gradually diminish.

It is doubtful, however, whether the people of the south and east will ever face the moment when Ukrainian 'comes knocking on the door of their houses.' In these solidly Russian-speaking regions language attitudes would appear particularly hard to change. It seems that a decisive language shift is only conceivable there under a sustained policy of ukrainianization. That language policies aimed at reversing linguistic trends and revitalizing low status languages do indeed have the ability to mold the linguistic conduct of the citizenry is illustrated by evidence from outside the Ukrainian context. Thus, citing the case of Quebec, Arel (1999) maintains that the Péquist(e) language project of the late 1970s to this day has fundamentally changed the image of Québécois French as a low status language, and has greatly enhanced the incentive to learn it. Similarly, it can be argued that the creation of sharply demarcated unilingual areas in Belgium has effectively stopped the advance of French to the north, and has eliminated the French-speaking pockets in major Flemish cities. And yet, the examples of Quebec and Flanders may not be very instructive for eastern and southern Ukraine, as the language revival programs in the former two regions were in essence defensive. They merely sought to preserve and resuscitate a threatened language in an area where the vast majority of the population still spoke this language. By contrast, the Ukrainian renaissance project aims at introducing the vulnerable language in regions where the high status language is dominant, in regions moreover with sizable urban populations. I know of no historical precedent of a state successfully infusing a language formerly held in low esteem into millions of urbanites who homogeneously spoke a high status language before.

In addition, the prospects for a steady policy of ukrainianization are highly uncertain. As Andrew Wilson sought to evince in his book, the nationalizing project can only count on the support of a minority of the population. Opinion polls have repeatedly shown a majority of Ukraine's citizens to be in favor of granting Russian some official status. If this wish is indeed fulfilled, the incentive to achieve a refined command of Ukrainian will be critically diluted. A change in policy is unlikely to happen in the near future as President Kuchma defeated the divided left-wing opposition in elections in the fall of 1999. But if the political left unites and fields one single candidate in the elections scheduled for 2004, the political landscape may well alter, resulting in a turn-around in language policies.

However even if the current language politics are continued for the next several decades, an economic recovery could well remove any stimulus for the Russian speakers of the south and east to assimilate. The impact of an economic upswing on linguistic trends is likely to be related to the region(s) this recovery originates from. If the initiative for the upturn comes from the Ukrainian-speaking west or central regions (including Kyiv), economic growth is likely to be beneficial for assimilation, as many Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians will then feel a strong incentive to acquire a comprehensive
command of the titular language. In this scenario, Ukraine would resemble Estonia and Latvia, where Russian speakers vie with one another to obtain a place in the prospering titular economy. However, if the initiative comes from the south and east, the Russian speakers of these regions could well experience the rule of the center as a burden obstructing their region’s further development. In this scenario, they are likely to hold onto their language and press for a severance of ties with the center, a response which may well be reinforced by grievances emanating from restrictive nation-building policies. An economic recovery could actually be expected to come from the south and east because it is these regions that generate the bulk of Ukraine’s agricultural and industrial production and commercial activities. If such a future materializes, Ukraine’s south and east could be on the way to becoming a second Catalonia, the economically most advanced region of Spain where the Catalans as the titular group constantly press for more autonomy.