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# (Re)Learning Ukrainian: Language Myths and Cultural Corrections in Literacy Primers of Post-Soviet Ukraine

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**(Re)Learning Ukrainian: Language myths and cultural  
corrections in literacy primers of post-Soviet Ukraine**

by  
Michael A. Mead

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee  
of Lehigh University  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
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This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Comparative and International Education

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the decades after gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine's policies in several spheres, from media to diplomatic relations, but especially in education, continue to conscientiously reaffirm and shape what it means to be culturally Ukrainian. As powerful representations of "official knowledge" and predominant cultural constructions, textbooks serve as windows on popular, circulating constructions of the Ukrainian national identity. Previous analysis of post-Soviet textbooks in Ukraine has identified a powerful tendency to construe the Ukrainian "nation" in primarily monoethnic and monolingual terms. This study seeks to expand on literature concerning history and social studies texts of secondary grades by turning its attention to a body of texts so far mostly ignored in the analysis of post-Soviet textbooks – the bukvar, a basal literacy textbook used in the first grade. As texts that not only teach basic Ukrainian phonics, they likewise teach what learning/speaking the "native" language means – politically and culturally. Through critical analysis of eight bukvars published in the past two decades of Ukrainian independence by major educational printers, I find that the first grade literacy texts resonate with the national(ist) mythology seen in the country's later grades' textbooks, reifying the Ukrainian language as the essential, and essentialized, constituent of a distinctly Ukrainian monolingual, ethnocultural, and national identity. In conclusion I argue that such a stark ethnocultural construction of national identity is far from representative of Ukraine's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual composition, especially its large Russian ethnic and linguistic constituency, and thus marginalizes many of Ukraine's youth as not "authentically" Ukrainian.

# **(Re)Learning Ukrainian: Language myths and cultural corrections in literacy primers of post-Soviet Ukraine**

## **Introduction**

Increasingly, particular understandings of the “nation” are unlikely to be produced and sustained without a state educational system institutionalizing its central narratives, delineating its boundaries, and acculturating individuals to its attendant values and notions of collective identity (Apple, 1990; Gellner, 2006; Wanner, 1998). School textbooks, in that they are both perceived as, and are designed to constitute “official knowledge,” are vessels ripe for the embodiment and transmission of such state-envisioned histories, memories, and discourses of nation(hood) (Apple, 1992; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991, Schissler & Soysal, 2005). Presenting their content through a particular language that separates the author from the text, textbooks invite readers to view their content as neutral, objective, and factual, and thus above bias, criticism, and doubt (Olsen, 1989). In this way, textbooks are particularly effective in subtly imparting the selective traditions and ideologies of dominant social and cultural groups – a “latent curriculum” – onto the supposedly neutral “manifest curriculum” of the subject(s) they cover (Venezky, 1992, p. 438). As Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) explain, textbooks, more so than other forms of media, are especially apt at “signify[ing]—through their content and form—particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organizing that vast universe of possible knowledge” (p. 326).

In times of radical social and political change, newly possible, newly viable “constructions of reality” may occasion, influence, or even necessitate the extensive and systematic rewriting of textbooks – and this was certainly the case with those (nation-)states

(re)emerging from the ashes of the Soviet Union in 1991. From Latvia to Turkmenistan, many of the young republics of the former Soviet Union sought to carefully manage the mass revision of their school texts in the years immediately following independence (see, e.g., Kuzio, 2005; Livoskaya & Karpov, 1999; Michaels & Stevick, 2009; Popson, 2001; Silova, 1996; Zajda & Zajda, 2003). While many, like the Baltic states or even Russia itself, have been able to revive particular, pre-Soviet *national* myths and narratives long repressed, obscured, and quite selectively edited by the Soviet school of historiography, other, more nascent republics – like the fledgling states of Central Asia – have in some cases taken to forging completely new histories (see, e.g., Denison, 2009).

In the quest to assert a claim on historical legitimacy and to articulate a distinct national identity, Ukraine can be said to have a particularly arduous task, hard pressed to disentangle itself from a centuries-old and intimate enmeshment with the culture and history of its large East Slavic neighbor – Russia. As a country having recently celebrated nearly twenty years of existence as an independent state, studying the content of Ukraine's textbooks provides a window on the narratives and ideologies that make up the state's selective vision of the uniquely Ukrainian nationhood and national identity. And indeed, a number of studies over the past two decades have already attested to the high degree of nation-building content embedded in Ukrainian textbooks (Janmaat, 2004; 2005, 2007; Kuzio, 2005; Popson, 2001). In contrast to Apple's (1992) idea that the processes of cultural commodification in textbooks are *dynamic*, reflecting both continuities and contradictions of the dominant culture, these textbook analyses have found that elementary and secondary school texts in Ukraine consistently emphasize particular notions over others. Although it has been recognized that history texts are slowly moving closer to constructing the contemporary Ukrainian nation in modern, *civic* or citizenship

based terms – allowing for multi-faceted ethnic, cultural, and linguistic makeup – the texts of independent Ukraine predominantly define their “nation” as one based on descent from a distinctly *Ukrainian* ethnic and linguistic core (Janmaat, 2004, 2005; Popson, 2001). Consistently, the studies reveal the strong presence of narratives slanting toward the Ukrainophile school of historiography, including the representation of the Kyivan-Rus’ as a proto-Ukrainian ethnically and embryonic state (Janmaat, 2004; Kuzio, 2005; Popson, 2001), and the portrayal of Russians as a (sometimes villainous) ethnocultural “other” (Janmaat, 2007). Moreover, considering the enduring conviction that language and nationhood are irrevocably connected, and the inability of political institutions to produce alternative, distinguishing identity markers, Janmaat (2004, 2005) argues that Ukrainian history texts have embraced the Ukrainian language, above all, as *the* primary constituent of (ethno)national identity.

The exclusionary, ethnoculturally- and linguistically-based concept of nation found in Ukrainian textbooks resonates with what has been seen in the materials of other post-Soviet education systems, including Kazakhstan (Ismailova, 2004) Latvia (Silova, 1996), Lithuania (Beresniova, 2011), Poland (Gross, 2010), and Slovakia and Estonia (Michaels & Stevick, 2009) to name just a few. Although such previous scholarship is certainly important, these studies, like the vast majority of those concerned with the constructions of nation(hood) embedded in textbooks, predominantly concern only history or social studies texts used for grades five or above (see also Schissler & Soysal, 2005; Soysal, 2006). The focus on this subject and age level is, of course, understandable. And yet, as this study suggests, is it not quite accurate to say, as Janmaat (2005) does, that Ukrainian pupils are “first acquainted with [the] history of Ukraine at age 10 in the fifth grade” (p. 8). Put into the hands of Ukrainian children several years before their history texts, the *bukvar*, an introductory literacy primer gradually made ubiquitous

throughout the Soviet Union with the arduous introduction of compulsory schooling, likewise introduces young and impressionable pupils to the Ukrainian nation and the popular myths and ideologies associated with it. Filled not only with the letters of alphabet and simple phonetic exercises, bukvars also contain pages of folktales, poems, and vibrant illustrations. Quite often, these seemingly innocuous texts speak to or illustrate salient topics of Ukrainian national identity and ideology, from vignettes on ancient Kyiv and the Kyiv-Rus' to allusions to the tense history of Ukrainian-Russian relations. To this date, I am aware of only Filippova (2009) having also examined the nation-building content of post-Soviet Ukrainian bukvars, tracing the replacement of Soviet and communist images and discourses with distinctly Ukrainian cultural tropes, illustrations, and narratives. While illuminating and valuable, Filippova's study is brief, explores only three texts (of the Soviet, *perestroika*, and independent era, respectively), and provides a rather general review of the major and apparent ideological changes to the texts. My study considers a larger sample of post-Soviet texts and explores a particular aspect of the bukvars' ideological material in much more analytic depth and focus.

As language learning texts, the bukvars also, significantly, contain texts *about* language. Since the beginning of a people and society that could even be called "Ukrainian," battles over the Ukrainian language, and the politics and the ideologies surrounding its use and status, have been paramount to questions of Ukrainian cultural and national identity. Amongst the bukvars' wealth of nation-imagining content then, I employ critical discourse analysis in unpacking the bukvars' metatext – its *language about language*. To the extent that the eight post-Soviet bukvars considered herein teach Ukrainian children the *ridna mova* (native language/tongue), they likewise teach what speaking the "native" language *means* – and they do so in a manner strikingly consistent with a long held tradition of national(ist) mythology seen in other Ukrainian

textbooks, reifying the Ukrainian language as *the* essential, and essentialized, constituent of a distinctly Ukrainian ethnocultural, national identity.

### **Language legacies and enduring myths in post-Soviet Ukrainian schooling**

With the emergence of an independent Ukraine in 1991 there came the inheritance of a centuries-old history of language politics that was complicated and often deeply divisive. The repressive language policies of both tsarist rule and the later Soviet regime, combined with the sociocultural (and economic) allure of speaking Russian, as well as the simple reality of thorough Russian/Ukrainian social integration, has led to the present day reality that roughly one-quarter to one-third of the people residing in Ukraine identify Russian as their “mother” language (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001)<sup>1</sup>, and some degree of bilingualism is nearly universal throughout the country (Bilaniuk, 2005). Moreover, Russian predominates in the east and south regions, where Russian language hegemony and active Russification efforts endured relatively unabated for centuries. By any measure, thus, independent Ukraine is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state, and individual language profiles are mixed and fluid in practice (Bilaniuk, 2005; Bilaniuk & Melnyk 2008; Wilson, 2009). The difficulty becomes, however, to what extent do Ukrainians, in general, envision their relatively new state in such fluid and pluralistic terms?

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<sup>1</sup> Although a new Ukrainian census was scheduled for 2011, this has been rescheduled – via vote by the Cabinet of Ministers – for 2012 (Interfax-Ukraine, 2010). Although the reasons for the census being pushed back is not explicitly known outside of logistic concerns, we may reasonably speculate that criticism and concern over the form of the census questions is likewise a possible cause for its delay. Determining actual language preferences and practices via the census has been highly problematic (Arel, 2002). The 2001 Ukrainian census asked individuals to state their “native language,” without explanation as to what is meant exactly by that highly ambiguous term. For various reasons, there is marked tendency amongst people residing in Ukraine to indicate the category of “mother tongue” as a reiteration of their individual sense of ethnicity or “nationality” rather than their actual language profile or habits. (Arel, 2002).

Answering this question inevitably demands a return to the 19th century beginnings of the Ukrainian national movement and to the particular language ideology it co-opted and cultivated. Inspired by and in alignment with the thought being upheld by various popular nationalist movements immediately surrounding them, the educated and educating class of Ukrainian elite propagated the spreading (western) European philosophy positing that one's language profile and ethnocultural profile naturally and essentially coincided (Magocsi, 2002). Or, as Benedict Anderson (2006) has rather lyrically described it, "the conviction that languages...were, so to speak, the personal property of quite specific groups – their daily speakers and readers – and moreover that these groups, imagined as communities, were entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals" (p. 84). Whereas before a Ukrainian (or proto-Ukrainian) linguistic profile had not been popularly conceptualized as a feature that necessarily corresponded to one's political, social or cultural allegiances, in the 19th century, Ukrainian was ideologically essentialized and (re)imagined as *the* "native language" of a "native people" (Wilson, 2009, p. 87). And with the conflation of *lingos* with *ethnos*, stateless Ukrainians articulated their natural right to a "native soil." As Wilson (1998) explains, by equating a language with ethnicity leaders of the Ukrainian national movement "felt able to assert the existential unity of all Ukrainians," and in doing so likewise asserted the right to a particular "political geography," a national homeland (p. 126).

In the decade immediately following independence, those in state educational sectors continued to adhere to the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy that one's ethnocultural and linguistic profile (should) quite naturally coincide (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007; Stepanenko, 1999). In 1995, Kuchma's minister of education, Zgurovsky, articulated this idea in stark terms, saying, "Take away everything from the people and all of it can be returned, but take away a language and

people cannot ever recreate it. If a people's language is dead, the people are also dead" (as cited in Stepanenko, 1999, p. 123). And even earlier, Kravchuk's deputy minister of education, Anatolii Pohribnyi, expressed an equally bold sentiment: "the Russification of such a large number of Ukrainians is only superficial, exterior [and therefore] a more or less *temporary*...phenomenon, not an internal one. At the level of ethnopsychology, in their depths these Russophones remain Ukrainians" (as cited in Wilson, 2009, p. 208, emphasis in original). Clearly, for the education sector elites above, Ukrainians should speak Ukrainian, and any internal (language) division of Ukrainian society is wholly unnatural; that is, Russophone or so-called Soviet Ukrainians are the product of unjust systematic and artificial cultural manipulation (Wilson, 2009, p. 208). Thus, with the political and almost *moral* mandate to culturally rebuild the "national integrity," one presumed to be thoroughly violated by pre-Soviet and Soviet Russification efforts, language policies and ideologies in schools – even more so than in other public and state sectors – are premised on the supposed naturalness of a monocultural Ukrainianization effort (Koshmanova, 2006; Stepanenko, 1999; Wanner, 1998). To a great extent, Ukrainianization efforts and elements in schooling have lessened from their rather feverous pitch in the 1990s, now competing with an array of other educational drives and philosophy (e.g. global citizenship, an emphasis on international job market competitiveness). Yet, it continues to be the case that expansion and development of Ukrainian cultural consolidation remains a fundamental point of emphasis in educational programming and policy today, competing with so-called postmodernist or postnational education paradigms rather than replacing them (Janmaat & Piattoeva). As Olena Fimyar's (2010) fascinating discourse analysis of key policy texts from 1991-2008 reveals, Ukrainian educational policy and discourse, especially in the 2000s, is host to a number of hybrid ideological currents, whether compelled to



“recapture Ukraine’s past,’ and build a ‘spiritually and culturally rich’ nation” or to “catch up with “Europe,”” and thereby build a ‘modern and technologically advanced’ market economy” (p. 85).

Regardless of the tensions and inconsistencies inherent in Ukrainian education policy and thought, the promotion of the status and use of the Ukrainian language as a necessary part of state and cultural consolidation has remained paramount since independence. In Ukraine, school language policy derives from the 1989 law establishing Ukrainian as the sole state language. The law stipulated that schooling should be conducted in a child’s “native language,” although it also – following European-established norms (Bilaniuk & Melnyk, 2008, p. 76) – guaranteed parents the right to choose their child’s language of instruction. In reality, however, the choice of language of schooling is not easily exercised by parents; rather, operating under the logic that language is linked to ethnic identity, local authorities fix the proportion of schools operating in a particular language on the basis of the *ethnic* composition of the population (Hrycak, 2006; Stepanenko, 1999). As a result, most children in today’s Ukraine are assigned to schools on the basis of reported ancestry, therefore perhaps obscuring and/or ignoring the language profile and preferences of millions of Russophone Ukrainians from primarily Russian-speaking families (Pavlenko, 2008).

Despite the periodic bursts of indignation that arise from Russophones in various political arenas and in election-time rhetoric, school policies and other language politics have not, in general, escalated to society-fracturing levels. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, but Alexandra Hrycak (2006) interestingly posits that we should understand the historical legacies of the terms “native/mother language” and “parental choice” and the policies that surround them. As discussed above, as early as the mid-19th century, Ukrainian intelligentsia had established the

ideology that “native language” is not to be construed as the language of primary use or preference, or even as the language into which children are socialized by their parents or peers; instead, native language is the product of your ethnic ancestry. Ironically perhaps, early Soviet linguistic campaigns for “nativization” [*korenizatsiia*] and the concomitant philosophy positing the primacy of nationalities as objective, “organic” realities only served to reify this principle (Arel, 1995, 2002; Hrycak, 2006). Thus, based on the interaction of pre-Soviet and Soviet ideological and institutional legacies alike, Hrycak (2006) contends that it is not only Ukrainophiles who take such notions for granted but that Russophone Ukrainians as well tend to “accept” an ethnically-based construct of “native language.” The notion of “parental choice,” on the other hand, continues to be linked to Soviet politics unjustly favoring the position and hegemony of Russian as parents opt for Russian on the basis of its real and/or perceived status and power.

In independent Ukraine, then, the long and arduous story of imagining and consolidating a distinctly “Ukrainian” ethnic and national identity thus continues to be inextricably interwoven with the struggle for the revival and elevation of the Ukrainian language – in both institutional and ideological terms. And if the long Russification (linguistically and culturally) of schools was historically seen as the politics of destroying what it means to be Ukrainian, than in the post-Soviet era the renewed Ukrainianization of schools has become paramount to (re)construction of a distinctly Ukrainian national identity (Stepanenko, 1999, Wanner, 1998). School language policy is based on an enduring “native language” principle, asserted as altogether natural by political leaders, and, as argued by Hrycak (2006) and Arel (1995, 2002), tacitly accepted by the majority of the Ukrainian population.

As mentioned earlier, substantial previous research (Janmaat, 2004; 2005; 2007; Popson, 2001) has revealed the degree to which the narrative of language-and-nationhood is present and maintained in state-sponsored Ukrainian history and social studies textbooks of several grades. For example, at the time of Janmaat's 2004 study, the officially approved history text for 9<sup>th</sup> grade<sup>2</sup> stated that "membership in the Ukrainian nation was above all determined by the native [i.e. Ukrainian] language" (p. 107, as quoted in Janmaat, 2004, p. 12). Moreover, these history and/or civic texts unwaveringly attribute the historical declines in the status and use of Ukrainian to deliberate Russification policies and efforts (Janmaat, 2004; 2007; Popson, 2001). Importantly, they neglect discussion of Ukrainian and Russian's close linguistic relatedness and how this essential characteristic greatly facilitates language change/mixing in way that differs from other forms of linguistic imperialism. Also, they omit mention of various non-deliberate (non imperial/colonial) factors of language assimilation, namely the simple fact of close and prolonged social and human contact, including a substantial degree of intermarriage and cohabitation between Russian-speakers and Ukrainian-speakers.

As texts involved with the more pragmatic aspects of teaching of the Ukrainian language, post-Soviet Ukrainian bukvars likewise serve as material ripe for the maintenance and perpetuation of this enduring 19<sup>th</sup> century language ideology, still an essential, altogether "natural" facet of the education sector's ongoing commitment to Ukrainianization program assuming the organic connection of *ethnos* with *lingos*.

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<sup>2</sup> V.H. Sarbei, *Istoria Ukrainy: XIX - nachalo XX veka* (Kyiv: Heneza, 1996), pp. 223 [A history of Ukraine in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries].

### **(Re)reading the literacy primers: Sample and method**

In the highly centralized education system of Ukraine, the Ministry of Education not only makes all decisions regarding curricular content, it likewise regulates the selection of textbooks and the “official knowledge” embedded in and conveyed by them. Although the production of textbooks takes place in a partially liberalized market, new textbooks go through a complex process of review, testing, and revision before they can be included on an annual Ministry-published list of texts approved for use by class and grade level (Janmaat, 2005; Popson, 2001). Moreover, textbook adoption throughout the country does not reflect a large degree of regional variances despite important political and cultural differences among regions (Popson, 2001, p. 328).<sup>3</sup> The state, therefore, still has a large influence on how texts are written, with only a select sample of these texts that ultimately find themselves in the hands of schoolchildren throughout Ukraine.

For the purposes of this study, I have compared and analyzed the content of six Ukrainian-language bukvars and two Russian-language bukvars published in Ukraine, all marked as approved by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine. The publication dates of this sample range from the late-90s through 2010, providing a representation of texts spanning Ukraine’s most recent decade of independence – although many of the texts are subsequent, modified versions of earlier, original publications. (See Table 1.) The majority of the textbooks (5) were published by either Osvita or Heneza, each major producers of educational materials in Ukraine – publishers creating texts for both lower and secondary levels and publishing in both Ukrainian and Russian. And indeed, both Russian-language books included in this sample are variants of an Osvita and

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<sup>3</sup> Rodgers (2006), however, has shown that there is some local variation in textbook produced and used in Ukraine. Moreover, he suggests that content of school history books among regions is very much negotiated in various localities, with “regional elites in each area ‘picking and choosing’ which parts of the ‘official state narrative to accept and which parts to reject’” (p. 681).

Heneza text also published in Ukrainian, with the texts in each language having been written by the same authors, respectively.

As the primers composing this sample are primarily those of major educational publishing houses and all approved by the MoE, we can be quite confident that they are widely used in schools and generally reflective (or at least not contradictory) of state-held educational discourses – on the value of the Ukrainian language and otherwise. It should be noted, however, that this sample is hardly representative of the greater plurality of less widely disseminated primers that have recently become available and approved by the MoE, such as primers produced in Yiddish or Crimean Tatar.<sup>4</sup> These textbooks are undoubtedly reflective of a more diverse identity constructions and language ideologies than those of Osvita or Heneza, but remain beyond the scope of this limited analysis.

The two-Russian language books (one-fourth of the sample) were included to provide an exploratory analysis of how texts intended for Russian-speaking/learning students portray language in comparison with those written for Ukrainian-language learning. The texts were published in Kyiv with the single exception of a 1998 textbook published in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, which is significant considering the city's historical and contemporary role as a center for the cultivation of the Ukrainian language and cultural identity.

Throughout the paper, textbooks will be cited by date and publisher. Rather than cite texts via authors, this citation method was chosen as it is often the case that texts within the bukvars are credited to someone other than the primary author, for example, to a famous poet or writer. It should be assumed that all texts are Ukrainian-language unless otherwise noted. Finally, for the sake of brevity, the samples of any text will be provided in English only – unless

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank the first anonymous reviewer for turning my attention to this crucial point.

the original text contained a word or phrasing expressing a connotation lost in translation. In many cases, the texts analyzed here are highly stylized, poetic compositions. Nevertheless, I have chosen to render translations as literally as possible to avoid adding any external meaning and connotation to the texts.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1.** Literacy primers analyzed

<b>Publ. Date (Orig. Publ.)</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Language</b>
<b>1998</b> (1997)	Svit (pub. in Lviv)	Lutsyk, Prots, Savshak	Ukrainian
<b>2001</b> (2000)	Forum	Pryshchepa, Kolesnychenko	Ukrainian
<b>2002</b> (1986)	Osvita	M. Vashulenko, Matyeeva, Nazarova, Skrypchenko	<b>Russian</b>
<b>2004</b> (2001)	Osvita	M. Vashulenko, Skrypchenko	Ukrainian
<b>2007</b> (2001)	Osvita	M. Vashulenko, Skrypchenko	Ukrainian
<b>2007</b> (1997)	Heneza	Pryshchepa, Kolesnychenko	<b>Russian</b>
<b>2009</b> (2007)	AST-Pres-Ukraine	M. Vashulenko, V. Vashulenko	Ukrainian
<b>2010</b> (2000)	Heneza	Preshchepa, Kolesnychenko	Ukrainian

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<sup>5</sup> All translations were done by the author with assistance from native-speakers of Ukrainian and Russian.

## *Method*

In the greater social field of power, where multiple discourses are generated and circulated, textbooks, including even those of early grades, are particularly influential in advancing and maintaining particular versions of reality (Apple, 1991, 1992; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1992; Venezsky, 1992). My own reading of these texts thus draws on traditions of textual analysis more akin to critical literary studies than social science methodologies. In particular, I have modeled by reading after Michel Foucault's (1980) theories of discourse as knowledge/power (see also Said, 1978). In reading the primers of this sample, I first identified all those texts that explicitly reference language (Ukrainian or otherwise) itself – the books' meta-texts – of which there are many, from poems stressing that students “never forget their language” to vignettes on animals speaking Ukrainian. In subsequent re-readings I was concerned with finding patterns, similarities, and family resemblances amongst these meta-texts, with aim to tracing how within each book and across the sample, multiple texts centripetally converge toward a coherent set of meanings – discourses – that naturalize certain notions into common sense over others, “constrain[ing] the possibility of thought [because they] order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations” (Ball, 1990, p. 2). As illustrations are particularly vibrant focal points of the primers, additional attention was paid to how visual elements resonate with or contribute to linguistic texts.

In what follows, I will present a detailed literary analysis of select texts exemplifying the central and mutually reinforcing metaphors making up an overwhelmingly ethnonational discourse on language; exploring how (1) the conflation of language with ancestry (the language of a native people) interweaves with (2) the construction of language as rooted to a territorial homeland (language as “native”), and thus (3), ultimately becomes articulated in explicitly

political, national terms. As the analysis of the bukvars will reveal – both explicitly and implicitly, both through metaphor and imagery – these textbooks teach that the Ukrainian language is one-third of a pure, essentialized, indivisible trinity. Ukrainian, as overwhelming presented in the bukvars, is the “native” language of an ancestral, “native” people, belonging to a particular, primordial, and “native” homeland.

### **(Re)Learning Ukrainian: Language politics and cultural corrections**

On the opening page of the 2010 Heneza primer, an illustration shows a boy and girl seated at desks, a paper and pencil in front of each them – apparently, in a classroom. Just behind them a window opens to scene of lush, wildly abundant nature, featuring mountains, a peaceful river, and a small village house on a gently sloping green hill. While the girl, dressed in traditional Ukrainian costume and with her hair fitted with bows, writes diligently on the paper, the boy, is dressed in a suit and tie and has his left hand raised. (See Image 1 below.) The boy seems to be raising his hand in response to a teacher beyond the boundaries of the illustration. And yet, a quite different interpretation is possible once the text immediately below the image is considered:

Learn, my friend,  
be an excellent student,  
love both fields and groves!  
And wherever you may be,  
wherever you live – do not forget  
your Ukrainian [української] language!  
(p. 3)

This text, a small verse credited to Volodymyr Sosyura, a member of Ukrainian People’s Army of 1918-1919 and poet who wrote lyrics full of pride for his native Ukraine, allows for



another interpretation of the boy's raised hand. It is possible that the boy is not merely getting the attention of an unseen teacher; he is perhaps taking a kind of *oath* with his palm upheld, taking, that is, the *pledge* of Sosyura: to be an “excellent student,” one who never “forgets” the Ukrainian language wherever he may be or live.<sup>6</sup>

**Image 1.** Poem by Volodymyr Sosyura with classroom image



(Kyiv: Heneza, 2010, p. 3)

<sup>6</sup> There is, it should be noted, another viable interpretation of this image. Dressed in a suit and tie, and with his raised arm supported at the elbow by his free hand, the image of the boy resonates quite closely with classic images of the Soviet schoolchild – always at the ready, diligent in his study, and knowing all the answers. I thank Olena Fimyar for pointing this out. Moreover, that the boy should look so “Soviet” and that the girl so traditionally “Ukrainian” is an interesting example of two dynamics not explored in this paper, but quite interestingly embedded in the post-Soviet bukvars: (1) the high degree of gender differentiation within the books, with girls embodying models of pastoral, rural Ukrainians, and (2) the lingering relevance of Soviet constructions and images of the child.

Taking into account the opening of the 2010 Heneza text, let us now consider the ending of both the 2004 and 2007 version of the Osvita text. On each book's back cover there are identical messages to the student assumed to have finished the book:

Dear friend!  
You're finished reading the first and *most important textbook* - BUKVAR.  
Hopefully, it became a true friend to you. The Bukvar opened your first footpath to the world of knowledge. *It taught [you] love and respect for the Ukrainian language.*  
Now you can independently read many interesting books that will help you gain solid knowledge.  
(back cover, emphasis added).

Although the text acknowledges its pedagogically crucial role of teaching basic Ukrainian literacy and thus the ability for students to continue their learning and studying *in Ukrainian*, this, evidently, is hardly the only reason that the bukvar is proclaimed to be the “most important textbook.” In addition to teaching language literacy, clearly the primer is explicitly assumed to have “taught *love and respect* for the Ukrainian language.”

Across the entire sample, and from beginning to end, the literacy primers hardly take the presence and use of the language they teach for granted. From the opening of the 2010 Heneza text featuring Sosyura's “oath,” to the back cover of the 2004 and 2007 Osvita books assuming to have taught its students “love and respect for the Ukrainian language,” the bukvars contain several texts cultivating an important meta-language on the *ridna mova* (native language), discursively constructing the Ukrainian language as essential for Ukrainian national identity and the (relatively) young Ukrainian (nation-)state.

*Native Ukraine, Native Ukrainian (people and language)*

Throughout the primers of the post-Soviet period, multiple texts emphasize the Ukrainian language as a fundamental constituent of the Ukrainian ethnocultural identity. Appearing only 12 pages after Sosyura's oath-taking poem and illustration, page 15 of the 2010 Heneza book contains yet another language pledge. In fact, entitled "Oath" [клятва], this short poem by Volodymyr Luchuk construes language as a key element in the reproduction and transmission of Ukrainian identity:

**Oath**

[Language] of nightingales, periwinkle,  
wheat fields  
my parents gave me the gift – forever! –  
of my native Ukrainian language

I will preserve it and nurture it  
everywhere and forever –  
since each one of us – like a mother –  
has only one language.  
(p. 15)

Evoking first the beauty of the language, the speaker of the poem treasures Ukrainian, both metaphorically tying the language to the land of Ukraine ("...[of] periwinkle, wheat fields"), and, significantly, understanding it as a "gift" from his/her parents. Much more than an aspect of mere parent-child socialization, the transmission of the Ukrainian language put forth in this poem is a rather more *reproductive* process – a gift not so much as given, but rather inherited via ancestry. To this end, consider first the dual meaning of the insertion "– forever! –" into the first stanza. The Ukrainian language, this suggests, is not only *a gift* that lasts forever, but it is also the *act* of this giving – the transmission of the Ukrainian tongue from generation to generation – that is ever-lasting, since "forever" and for "forever." And indeed, opening the second stanza, the speaker pledges to play his/her part in this eternal reproduction of language, weaving a metaphor

in which it is not only the speaker who takes on the role of the mother, but also the Ukrainian language itself. Indeed, in positing language as “like a mother” – of which each person only has *one* – the speaker reifies a strictly monolingual conceptualization of what constitutes one’s “native” or “mother” tongue, framing the transmission of language in rather hereditary terms and thus ultimately conflating one’s (singular) linguistic profile with one’s (singular, of course) “mother” or ancestral bloodline.

That the illustration surrounding the text features abundant fields of wheat, a rainbow, and a foreground focused on the sun-reaching vines of a lush periwinkle plant only further adds to the poem’s symbolism of reproduction and fertility. (See Image 2 below.) Finally, it should be noted, that an earlier, 2007 *Russian-language* version of this text published by the same authorship does not contain this Luchuk’s “Oath.” For the Russian-speaking and learning students, rather than a text concerned with “nurturing” Ukrainian, this page presents a text about carefully crossing the street (Heneza, 2007, p. 15). (See Image 3 below).

**Image 2.** “Oath” by Volodymyr Luchuk



(Kyiv: Heneza, 2010, p. 15)

**Image 3.** “Streetlight” by Vladimir Orlov in Russian language text



(Kyiv: Heneza, 2007, p. 15)

Luchuk's poem links Ukrainian to nature, but this feature is only secondary, buttressing its more primary metaphor of linguistic reproduction and inheritance. If that text conveys the fusion of linguistic identity to ancestry, we should turn elsewhere to see the tendency of the bukvars to fuse language to another essential ingredient of the Ukrainian national conception – the Ukrainian territory, the homeland. To this end, let's consider a text entitled “Native Land” (*ridna zemlya*) from the 2009 AST-Press-Ukraine primer. Describing a young crane apparently migrating back north for the summer, this text is remarkable for symbolizing the Ukrainian language as quite literally *native* to, and a natural element of, the Ukrainian territory itself:

From faraway lands,  
from distant worlds,  
a little [young] crane,  
rides his wings home.

Speeding over oceans,  
forests and seas,

he gazed through the fog:  
-- Whose land is that [he asked]?

Whose valleys are these?  
Whose meadows are these?  
Whose guelder rose berries<sup>7</sup>  
do the winds shake?

He recognized Ukraine:  
-- My land,  
my nest is here  
*and my language.*  
(p. 83, italics added)

From “faraway lands,” even “distant *worlds*” the diminutive crane flies back to *his* Ukraine, his “land,” his “nest.” For some reason not at all as foreign or alien as his winter retreats, Ukraine is unquestionably the crane’s “native” land. And soaring over oceans, forests, and everything in between, the crane demands not “*what* lands?” or “*which* valleys?,” but rather significantly “*whose* land,” even “*whose* guelder rose.” Here, the crane pronounces the notion that place, territory, *belongs* to someone; invoking the classic conception of “homeland,” a crane (a poetic stand-in for a person) is both *of* the “nest,” and reciprocally, *possesses* that “nest.” Clearly resonating with the poem, there is a short handwriting exercise underneath the “Native Land” text that asks the students to trace in cursive the well-known Ukrainian/Russian aphorism: “A person without a homeland is like a bird without wings [Людина без батьківщини - що пташка без крил].” In the fourth stanza, having now apparently recognized the flora and fauna, the topology and waterways familiar to him, the crane understands he has arrived at *his* home. And in ending, locating his nest – both metaphoric (Ukraine) and literal – the poem ends with the acknowledgement of one final “native” element, and thus, perhaps, the most important

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<sup>7</sup> Growing abundantly in Ukraine and featured myriad times in text and illustrations of the bukvars, the guelder rose is a deciduous shrub with small red berries that features prominently in Ukrainian cultural designs and motifs.

of all. As the reader begins to feel the distinct impression of the journey's end and of the crane descending for landing, the crane also "recognizes" *his* language, undoubtedly referring to Ukrainian. In a poem whose central device relies on the crane's movement through space and search for the natural elements demarking his home, language, at the end, is "recognized" in the company of various material, physical elements, and is thus as every bit as living and native to the Ukrainian homeland as the mountains, the guelder rose, and the crane himself.

Having carefully read a text constructing Ukrainian as a primary constituent of ethnic/ancestral identity, and one positing language as a quasi-physical element tied to the Ukrainian soil, in returning to the Heneza 2010 primer we can find a text, by Viktor Teren, that skillfully integrates both metaphors:

**Native language**

How nice it is dear children  
for you to look out the window!  
Through it is everything – poplars, flowers,  
the sun and a field near the house.

[Like] the window through which comes the morning sunlight,  
that which warms your face,  
is our native language –  
she opens the whole world.

Preserve it little ones  
because she [language] is like the pretty little window  
That your mother once  
carried you to and planted [you] on...  
(p. 45)

Here, again, the Ukrainian language is intimately associated with Ukraine's natural elements – flowers, trees, and then ultimately, with the children's entire field of vision. By the second stanza is implied that Ukrainian actually *is* the "window" through which it is "so nice" for the children

to look through; figuratively, the children’s lens for “opening” the world’s experience and meaning, its poplars and sunshine. And with a possible allusion to birth already established – the window opening out into the world – the third stanza only more clearly imbues the language with a nurturing, motherly connotation and function. Tasked, as in other texts, to “preserve” the Ukrainian language, the reader here is not only reminded (once again) that it is their mother who brought them to and placed them at this window sill, but, moreover, the language itself (again) acts as a kind of complementary, surrogate mother. Like potted plants warmed by the sunlight, the children, too, grow and bloom, in company with poplars and flowers in the garden beyond them – and all thanks to language, the window through which nourishing sunlight floods. Finally, accompanying this text is an illustration that powerfully resonates with this analysis of the poem, showing a boy and girl leaning through an open window, taking in the sight of a flourishing garden. (See Image 4 below.)

**Image 4.** “Native Language” by Viktor Teren, with illustration of children looking out window



(Kyiv: Heneza, 2010, p. 47)



So far, via the close readings of selected, exemplary texts, I have wished to isolate two aspects essential to the bukvars' treatment of the Ukrainian tongue: the conflation of *lingos* with ancestry, and the fusion of the language to the "native" land. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainophile philosophy still very much present in the pages of the bukvars, these conceptions necessarily coincide, conflate. Consistently informing how one reads all and subsequent texts on language, metaphors linking language to blood and kinship, to nature and the homeland, only mutually engender and reinforce one another. With this in mind, it seems appropriate to now to turn to those texts that rather explicitly employ these language metaphors and myths towards the assertion of a distinctly Ukrainian *national* identity, presenting the strikingly consistent and surprisingly strong insistence on modern day Ukraine as the exclusive, primordial homeland of an ethnolinguistically homogenous kin-group.

In this regard, a pair of remarkably similar texts from two separate bukvars, entitled "Our Homeland [*Наша Батьківщина*]" and "Your Homeland [*Твоя Батьківщина*]," respectively, deserve close attention:

#### **Our Homeland**

Homeland – is not only the land of our fathers, but grandfathers, [and] great grandfathers.

Homeland – the land where *has long been heard our native language and mother's song*. Our homeland is called Ukraine.

Ukraine is the endless fields of wheat, fields of flowering flax, cherry orchards. It's the Carpathians [mountains] and the mines of Donbas. It's the wide Dnepr Slavutych [river], which carries its waters into the Black Sea. Ukraine – this is the land where you live.

(Osvita, 2004 & 2007, p. 123; emphasis added)

#### **Your Homeland**

The word "Fatherland" [*bat'kivshchyna*] comes from the word "father" [*bat'ko*]. Homeland – the land where your parents and grandparents were born and raised. *This is the land where is heard your native language*.

*Every person – their own homeland*. We live in Ukraine. Ukraine is our Homeland.

(AST-Press-Ukraine, 2009, p. 64; emphasis added)

Using some form of the word “father” or “parent” no less than seven times between them, and in the case of the AST-Press text, going as far as to deliberately stress that etymological root of the word “*bat’kvshchyna*” ([*bat’ko*], father), both trace a familial inhabitation spanning back several generations. And although ending its genealogy with grandparents or great-grandparents, the intended sentimental effect is clear – the texts wish to convey the sense of a much longer, and, in fact, timeless and uninterrupted ancestral lineage: Ukrainians, that is, having been lived in this place virtually forever. Moreover, with explicit concern that its essential connection of ancestry to homeland (homeland to ancestry) doesn’t allow for any other peoples, any *other ancestries* to also claim Ukraine as “home,” both texts put forth an exclusively *monoethnic* framework for the nation-to-homeland correspondence. The AST-Press-Ukraine text, in fact, does away with this possibility succinctly, wrapping up with a statement that allows for no ambiguity on the matter: “Every person – their own homeland. We live in Ukraine. Ukraine is our homeland.” Conveying a similar ideology, the Osvita 2004/2007 “Homeland” text is pre-empted by a short text (appearing on the previous page) by the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Symonenko: “You can choose anything in this world, son, but you cannot chose your homeland” (p. 122).

Thus, leaving no room for civic or multi-ethnic/cultural conceptualizations, one’s national belonging – as articulated in the bukvars here – is neither elective nor plural. One is born into a particular ethnocultural group belonging to a particular place.

In these texts, rather tautologically, being *in* Ukraine and *being* Ukrainian effectively define each other: that is, since we are all Ukrainians, this homeland is Ukraine, and since this homeland is Ukraine, all of us are Ukrainians (and vice-versa).<sup>8</sup> And yet, the texts contain such

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<sup>8</sup> Also paramount to the conceptualization of any primordial, ethnocultural homeland is the mapping of its boundaries; how else after all, would you know you are “home”? To this end, the text from Osvita 2004/2007 avoids

deliberate syntactical constructions (“Our fatherland is called Ukraine”) and such heavy-handed, repetitive insistence (“We live in Ukraine. Ukraine – it’s our fatherland”) that their insecurities are perhaps all too apparent – a compensatory drive to revise a much less taken-for-granted reality. What these formulations of the “homeland” ignore is the reality of millions of people born into families with generations of ties to Ukraine who nevertheless do *not* consider themselves ethnically or even culturally Ukrainian – most notably and numerous ethnic Russians and bi-ethnic Ukrainian-Russians (Russian-Ukrainians). These texts elide the fact that although one’s parents and grandparents may have been born in a place that is *now* called “Ukraine,” it was only twenty years earlier known as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Finally, the story told by these texts also take care to obscure the *linguistic* realities of Ukraine.

In previous studies of post-Soviet Ukrainian textbooks, language has been inextricably linked to and constituting a distinctly Ukrainian ethnocultural identity (Janmaat, 2005; Popson, 2001). This is certainly the case here. In both texts, the national homeland is first described via the uninterrupted inhabitation of ancestral lineage, then, immediately following (and necessarily), as the land where “has long been heard our native language.” That other languages, of course, can also be heard in abundance throughout Ukraine doesn’t merit mentioning. And, in this regard, it is no accident that both texts here and the previous texts analyzed use the term “our/your *native* language” instead of explicitly referring to the “Ukrainian language” by name. As pointed out by many scholars (Arel, 1995, 2002; Hrycak, 2006), Ukrainians (and Russians), in general, have a quite specific, perhaps literal, understanding of the construction “native

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the tricky explanation of Ukraine’s historically and *politically* constructed state borders, and instead uses prominent natural features to trace altogether *natural* borders. From the Carpathian Mountains to the mines of Donbas the text delineates rough west-east boundaries, and from the Dnieper river to the Black Sea the text describes rough north-south borders (and thus conveniently including the semi-autonomous Crimean peninsula, a territorial claim still disputed with Russia). Using natural boundaries to define the map of Ukraine creates the impression that the state, too, like its mountains and waterways, has existed since time immemorial.

language” (*ridna mova* [Ukr.], *rodnoi yazyk* [Rus.]), being the language corresponding to one’s ethnic or ancestral background rather than the language first learnt or of preference. In both “homeland” texts, thus, Polish, Magyar, Belarusian, and most notably, of course, Russian, are not mentioned alongside Ukrainian as being “long heard” on this soil. Their insertion doesn’t fit with the logic underpinning the particular conception of nationhood found in the textbooks: that “native” to one land is one people; “native” to one people is one, “mother” language.

Previously, scholars have posited that Ukrainian textbooks in the post-Soviet era are gradually moving to a more inclusive, multiethnic and cultural construction of Ukrainian nationhood (Janmaat, 2005; Popson, 2001). Although premised on a “cultural pillar” strategy – insisting on a distinctly Ukrainian ethnocultural “core” as its overarching identity – these books also allow for the contemporary Ukrainian nation(-state) to be conceived of as multiethnic and -cultural, and as benefitting from this pluralism (Janmaat, 2005; Popson, 2001). Analysis of the post-Soviet bukvars here, however, does not reveal such a concession towards more civic and plural nation-building impulses. In the enduring Herder-esque philosophy of the strictly Ukrainophile nation-building framework illustrated in these texts, if a single, narrowly-defined people derive from and compose the nation(-state), then they necessarily speak a single, native (national) language, and vice-versa. It is, in fact, unnatural and nonsensical to separate these units into discrete elements. As the texts from the post-Soviet bukvars combine and converge to suggest, homeland, ethnos, and lingos, are essential and essentially co-terminous with one another, constituting and concomitantly reaffirmed by the existence of a homeland (nation-)state.

*For those of you who speak not only Ukrainian (or Russian)*

Although admittedly a small sample, analysis of two Russian-language bukvars (Osvita 2002; Heneza 2007) nevertheless provides some areas of fascinating contrast in comparison with the Ukrainian language texts. Moreover, as this sample includes an earlier (2007), Russian language version of the Heneza text written by the same authors (Pryshchepa and Kolesnychenko), direct comparison to its later (2010), Ukrainian-language counterpart is made possible. Featuring numerous pages between them that are exactly the same, and many more that differ in only minor, superficial ways, it is the areas of major difference between the two texts – rather than their similarities – that stand out as deliberate and thus salient.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Osvita (2002) and Heneza (2007) Russian language textbooks almost completely avoid any references to the Ukrainian language, and thus refrain from reifying the ideology naturalizing Ukrainian as the “native” language of Ukraine’s “native” people. The Osvita (2002) text, in particular, a later version of a book originally published in 1986, is remarkable its retention of certain Soviet vestiges (e.g., retaining a text on Yuri Gagarin) and the fact that it mentions nothing about the existence of the Ukrainian state. Other than a vignette on Taras Shevchenko and Kyiv, it features minimal coverage of what could be broadly considered “Ukrainian” content. The 2007 Heneza text in contrast, deserves close attention, as both implicitly and explicitly, it addresses Ukrainian language politics and Ukrainian- Russian bilingualism.

Significantly, the 2007 Heneza text devotes no less than three separate pages to celebrating the Ukrainian “homeland” and inculcating “love” for this place – only slightly less than the five found in its Ukrainian language counterpart. On page 112 of the book, a short untitled text bordered by photographs of Ukraine’s verdant nature begins with the sentences: “I

live in Ukraine. Ukraine – my homeland [*rodina*].” (Notice how this construction is almost identical to the final passage of the earlier discussed “homeland” text of the AST-Pres-Ukraine bukvar, page 83.) And shortly after this text, page 134 contains a more extended passage on the homeland, entitled “Homeland” [*rodina*]. Like so many of the Ukrainian language texts discussed before, this text, too, begins by framing the “homeland” in purely ancestral terms, reading, “Homeland – it’s mama, papa, sister, brother, grandma, grandpa, neighbors, friends. I love my homeland!”

Clearly, in this book, at least, the existence and political legitimacy of Ukrainian state is not only unquestioned, but in fact, embraced, “loved.” And yet, whereas previous analysis of the Ukrainian language bukvars indicates that content on the “native” and “mother” *language* was found to be an essential component of those “native” to the “homeland,” in the Russian language textbook, language is interestingly not mentioned at all in the texts pertaining to “home/motherland.” Instead, in all instances, the body of these texts read rather like laundry list summaries of the various geographical, natural features and cities making up Ukraine. Thus, the question becomes: *who counts as “native” in this Russian language text, and, moreover, what language(s) do they speak?* To better answer this question, we should turn away from the rather apolitical “homeland” texts and consider a quite different area of the book.

In common with *all* of the Ukrainian language texts analyzed in this sample, the two Russian language books contain pages near the back of the book dedicated to portraits of prominent literary figures. Whereas the Ukrainian language books feature texts on exclusively *Ukrainian* literary heroes and heroines, including Lesya Ukrainka, Ivan Franko, and, without fail, Taras Shevchenko, both Russian-language texts cover these auteurs as well as Alexander Pushkin, a paragon of the modern Russian vernacular and literature. The inclusion of Pushkin is

significant in itself – reflecting a wish for Russian-learning children in Ukraine to have some familiarity with a figurehead of *Russian* language and culture – but perhaps more interesting and telling is the treatment of the Ukrainian figures in the Heneza 2007, Russian language book. Here, above the short portraits of Shevchenko, Franko, and Lesya Ukrainka, is a short message highlighted in bright blue reading, “For those of you who can read not only Russian.” In contrast to the Ukrainian language texts, thus, the Heneza 2007 book acknowledges that its readers may be capable of reading in Ukrainian as well, and yet, it does so in a strangely elusive way, with a rather awkward construction that deliberately avoids saying more straightforwardly: “for those of you who can also read Ukrainian.” In what immediately follows, each literary figure’s page includes a short example of their work – provided not only in Russian, but also, repeated on the opposite page, in its original, *Ukrainian* language form. (See, e.g., Image 5 below.) Here, on the pages of a Russian language text, one can find written Ukrainian and, concomitantly (albeit awkwardly), the tacit assumption that some of its young audience might be able to actually read it. In contrast, the six Ukrainian language books reviewed for this study, it should be noted, don’t include a word of Russian that is not also shared in the Ukrainian lexicon.

While the abovementioned texts merely acknowledge and/or concede to the student’s possible bilingualism, a close reading of the Heneza 2007 book uncovers another, single page that more expressly, explicitly addresses Ukraine’s bivalent ethnolinguistic makeup – and, in a way even celebrates it, naturalizes it. On the page devoted to teaching the letter “я” [ya], a small illustration shows a pair of girls side by side in a verdant green field. While the girl on the right, wearing traditional Ukrainian dress and headwear, releases a dove into the air, the girl to her left, wearing traditional Russian dress, watches enraptured as the bird flies away. (See Image 6 below.) Accompanying the illustration is this text:

Ukraine and Russia – neighbors.  
We live in Ukraine.  
We learn the Russian language.  
We all know and love the Ukrainian language.  
Our homeland [*Rodina*] – Ukraine.  
(p. 72)

With a first line framing Ukraine and Russia as “neighbors,” the text begins by consciously undermining the Ukrainophile school of historiography that sometimes tends to portray Russia as a colonizing, foreign “other,” and thus colors our interpretation of the subsequent pronoun “we” who “live in Ukraine.” If not necessarily composed of its Russian “neighbors” in ethnic terms, this “we,” this “Ukraine” is unquestionably made up of Ukrainians *speaking* Russian, learning their neighbor’s language. And yet, although – significantly – indicating the reader’s knowledge of Russian before Ukrainian, the text goes on to tell the reader that “we *all* know and love Ukrainian” as well, thus – unlike Ukrainian language texts – acknowledging the country’s bilingual character.

Easily capable of being overlooked when skimming through the bukvar, this tiny text and illustration posits a strikingly different conception of Ukraine than in the Ukrainian language textbooks. In contrast to a naturalized portrayal of Ukraine’s “native” people as mono-ethnically Ukrainian, speaking singularly Ukrainian, this page from the Heneza 2007 text understands the possessive pronoun in “*Our* motherland” in more collective terms, envisioning Ukraine as the harmonious home of a bilingual (perhaps even bi-ethnic) Russian/Ukrainian population.



Image 5. “Poplar” by Taras Shevchenko in Russian and Ukrainian



(Kyiv: Heneza, 2007, p.126-7)

Image 6. “Ukraine and Russia – neighbors...” with illustration of Ukrainian and Russian girl



(Kyiv: Heneza, 2007, p. 72)

### **Conclusion: “Native Language in our Native Schools!”**

For a variety of reasons, the bukvar published in Lviv (*Svit*, 1998) stands out as deserving of a study devoted solely to its pages. Featuring the colorful and surrealist artwork of Viktoria Kovalchuk, a renowned graphic artist and writer from Lviv, the book is visually stunning, far surpassing the illustrations of the other books. And saturated with the religious themes, cultural tropes, and the Ukrainophile mythology often associated with and emanating from western Ukraine, the book embraces what one might expect of a text published in Lviv, the iconic cradle of Ukrainian culture and former epicenter of the Ukrainian national movement. On its final bi-fold, its last pages (pp. 190-191), the book dedicates an illustration and text to the language politics of Ukraine, employing and strongly asserting many of the metaphors and ideologies that have been examined throughout this paper. (See Image 7 below.) Needing little in the way of analysis or interpretation, it is this bookend perhaps that is the most fitting closing to this study:

Native language in the native school!  
Native language in the native school!  
What can sound more delightful?  
What can be closer and dearer,  
And more important in times of trouble?

Native language!  
What unites us –  
The first words by our mothers,  
the first lullaby.

How can we part with you,  
How can we forget your voice  
And in our own Country  
how can we speak with another one?

One whose soul seeks expression,  
One who wants to live the future,  
He will cry out with all his heart,  
In the native school – native language!  
(p. 192)

**Image 7.** “Native Language in our Native Schools!”



(Lviv: Svit, 1998, pp. 190-191)

Conveying a range of mutually reinforcing metaphors, motifs, and messages, text and imagery scattered throughout the pages of post-Soviet bukvars impart much more than basics of Ukrainian literacy. As this study has wished to explore, the textbooks convey and embrace the fundamentals of a language *myth* that has long been at the center of defining Ukrainian nationhood and that continues to inform the state education platform and policies. Herein, imbued with and reaffirming the “native language” principle embraced by Ukrainian (nation-)state education, bukvars naturalize and reify the essential – and essentialized – notion that the Ukrainian language is the primary constituent of distinctly Ukrainian (ethno)national identity – the “first [mother’s] words,” the “first lullaby” of a ethno-culturally homogenous people,

“native” to a particular polity. “In our own Country,” the texts consistently demand, “how can we speak with another [voice]?”

An obvious limitation of a study on textbook *content* is that we learn nothing about teachers’ classroom *use* of these materials. Do educators in classrooms throughout Ukraine highlight and bolster the notions imbedded in the bukvars, do they undermine or complicate them, reject or simply ignore them? And yet, despite such drawbacks, considering the high degree of attention, scrutiny, and requests for revisions that textbooks receive by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, we can nevertheless look to the content of education materials as windows through which to ascertain the broadly sweeping and predominant values, priorities, and ideologies deemed important by the creators and leadership of Ukraine’s education system. Findings arising from this genre of textbooks resonate with similar language conceptualizations identified by Janmaat (2004; 2005) in the much more often studied textbooks of higher grades. In significant contrast to what was seen in Ukrainian-language textbooks, analysis of two Russian-language bukvars of the post-Soviet era reveal a quite different conception of Ukrainian language politics. However, future study of a larger sample of Russian-language bukvars would be necessary to confirm this tendency.

Saturating the textbooks analyzed here, the native language principle identified in the bukvars is only part and parcel of a broader ideological paradigm found consistently in the textbooks of independent Ukraine, tending to define what counts as Ukrainian nationhood in overwhelming ethnocentric and historically continuous terms with only a gradual movement towards a more pluralistic, civic-based notion (Janmaat, 2004, 2005; Popson, 2001; see also Kuzio, 2005). If anything, this little studied genre of lower grade textbooks only seems to embrace the so-called “ethnocultural” conception of nationhood more stringently than higher

grade texts, communicating little to nothing of an alternative, civic-based conception. There could be several reasons for this, warranting additional scholarship. Is it the case that economic realities of Ukrainian textbook publishers hinder the creation of new texts, relying instead on the reprinting of earlier versions, with the finances to make only minor changes? Are those in the educator sector unable, or unwilling, to steer their focus away from other educational priorities, including attention to higher grade history and social studies books? Moreover, if the urge to remove or dilute ethnocentric content in texts is emerging or does, what or who is the source – popular calls to embrace the plurality of global citizenship or the institutional pressure to conform with European and global norms?

The education system of Ukraine, like other states emerging from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, is pushed and pulled by competing educational priorities, contested over by numerous voices both within the country and outside of it. Little more than a decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholars have identified that the nation-building impulse immediately following independence and characterizing much of Ukraine's first decade of independence now struggles with the forces of international pressure, tugging at Ukraine to "catch up with Europe" (Fimyar, 2010), or to more closely align with other international, global trends (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007). Textbooks, as pivotal pieces of any education system's curricula should be rightly regarded as very much contested, affected and implicated in this tug-of-war. And yet, research to date has shown the content of Ukrainian textbooks has been only slightly impacted by the increasingly postmodern plurality characterizing so much of Ukraine, instead still tending to reify an *exclusive, reductionist, and essentialist ethnocultural vision* of Ukrainian national identity. To this end, the seldom researched textbooks of lower, beginning grades deserve greater attention.

As this study has hoped to illustrate, the pages of post-Soviet bukvars – the first textbook placed in the hands of Ukrainian schoolchildren – only continue to teach what has always been articulated as the essential tenet of Ukrainian national identity and idea: Ukrainians speak their native Ukrainian – surely in their native schools, and, it is hoped, with certain attendant values, ideologies, and myths imbuing their every, native utterance.

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## VITA

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