Introduction:
Ukraine's Multilingualism

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There are many geopolitical and geostrategic reasons for Russia's armed intervention in Ukraine since 2014, but the Kremlin often distracts attention from them with the help of one very red herring: Ukraine's distinctive linguistic diversity, its multilingualism.

Over the past six years, in press briefings at home and abroad, Vladimir Putin has repeatedly alluded to the question of *language* to justify political and military aggression toward Ukraine, implicitly casting the country's complex, dynamic linguistic ecosystem as a space of discord and threat that the Russian Federation cannot abide. One of his slippery rhetorical touchstones is Ukraine's *russkoiazychnoe naselenie* or "Russian-speaking population,"[1] a categorization that could apply to virtually the entire country if left

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[1] In his seminal study of 1998, *Identity in Formation: The Russian Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*, David Laitin argued that a "conglomerate identity" he termed the "Russian-speaking population" was emergent among non-titular groups in post-Soviet space, especially in Ukraine, where he saw relatively fewer prospects of "Russians" (sic) assimilating into a nationalizing Ukrainian state. See David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 32–34. Laitin's forecast has been off the mark, especially in light of the failure of the so-called "Russian Spring" in Ukraine in 2014. As Volodymyr Kulyk points out, at this time "most of the east-southern residents [of Ukraine] speaking primarily Russian allied with their fellow [Ukrainian] citizens rather than their linguistic 'brethren' across the border... Rather than forming into a community distinguished primarily by its preferred language, they had gradually been transformed from Soviet people into Ukrainians—and that without drastic changes in their language practice." See Volodymyr Kulyk, "Identity in Transformation: Russian-Speakers in Post-Soviet Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 1 (2019): 157.

unqualified.[2] At the Normandy Format summit in Paris in December 2019, which aimed to help resolve the war in the eastern industrial areas of Ukraine known as Donbas, Putin vaguely demanded "democratic rights" for Ukraine's "Russian-speaking population"— with the democratically-elected, multilingual, Russian-speaking president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelens'kyi, sitting down the dais from him.[3] Putin's comments echoed his revealing remarks at a business forum in Moscow in October 2016, when he insisted that he "was forced—and I want to underscore this, *forced*—to defend the Russian-speaking population of Donbas."[4] His words were an admission of Russian involvement in an undeclared war that has, to date, claimed over 13,000 lives.

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[2]   The impact of decades of Soviet Russification policies, which has led to a dominance of the Russian language in Ukrainian popular media and culture, has meant that nearly all Ukrainians can speak Russian. Only 5.5% of Ukrainians register an inability to speak the language, according to a 2007 survey by the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. See O. Maiboroda (ed.), *Movna sytuatsiia v Ukraini: mizh konfliktom i konsensusom* (Kyiv: IPiEND im. I. F. Kurasa NAN Ukrainy, 2008), 52. Whether Ukrainians choose or prefer to speak Russian, and under what circumstances, is of course the more critical question. Moreover, Russian is spoken at home by Ukrainians all across the country. In 2016 the Razumkov Center revealed that 2% of Ukrainians in the west of the country identified Russian as their language of home use, compared to 10% in the center, 38% in the south, 40% in the east, and 52% in Donbas. Meanwhile, 3% of Ukrainians in the west of the country identified Russian *and* Ukrainian as languages of home use, compared to 26% in the center, 37% in the south, 32% in the east, and 34% in Donbas. See *Identichnist' hromadian Ukrainy v novykh umovakh: stan, tendentsii, rehional'ni osoblyvosti* (Kyiv: Tsentr Razumkova, 2016), 8.

[3]   Evgeniia Lutsenko, "Putin khochet, chtoby russkoiazychnoe naselenie po vsei Ukraine 'pol'zovalos' ravnymi pravami,'" *Hromadske.ua*, 10 December 2019, https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/putin-hochet-chtoby-russkoyazychnoe-naselenie-po-vsej-ukraine-polzovalos-ravnymi-pravami (accessed 11 December 2019). President Zelens'kyi offered a vividly haphazard multilingual response to Putin's comments. "Ukrainians with a decent education can speak in Russian and in Ukrainian," he said in Ukrainian. He then noted in Russian, "I can continue in the Russian language…," concluding in English, "you understand me." See "Zelenskii pro russkogovoriashchikh, rossiiskii gaz i granitsu Donbassa," *YouTube*, 9 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iv cqOQfo6C8 (accessed 11 December 2019).

[4]   "Investitsionnyi forum VTB Kapital 'Rossiia zovet!'" *Kremlin.ru*, 12 October 2016, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53077 (accessed 6 July 2019).

Such statements pivot on the reductive notion that language use determines political identity in Ukraine;[5] on the stale notion that there is a bounded, coherent constituency of Russian-speakers in the country; and on the absurd notion that they are somehow under threat from a Ukrainian state whose wartime presidents—Oleksandr Turchynov, Petro Poroshenko, and Zelens'kyi—are all native Russian speakers.[6] As Timothy Snyder puts it, "for Russia to invade Ukraine to protect the right of Ukrainian citizens to express themselves in the Russian language makes no more sense than Germany invading Switzerland to protect the rights of its German

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[5]   Studies increasingly show that language use in Ukraine is an unreliable determinant of political outlook or affiliation. As Kulyk argues, "the Euromaidan and the subsequent Russian aggression further detached language use from national identity, as many Russian speakers came to identify strongly with the inclusive Ukrainian nation without abandoning their accustomed language or even adding Ukrainian as an active part of their communicative repertoire." See Volodymyr Kulyk, "Language and Identity in Ukraine after Euromaidan," *Thesis Eleven* 136, no. 1 (2016): 90. For a focus on Donbas, also see Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, "War and Identity: the Case of the Donbas in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2–3 (2018): 140. Language on the whole is seen as a relatively minor factor in national identification in Ukraine, as Bureiko and Moga point out in a study of surveys conducted in 2013 and 2015. "[F]or self-identification as Ukrainian, the relevance of speaking Ukrainian was among the least preferred options for all respondents regardless of their native linguistic background." See Nadiia Bureiko and Teodor Lucian Moga, "The Ukrainian–Russian Linguistic Dyad and Its Impact on National Identity in Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 1 (2019): 146.

[6]   As noted in a 2017 report by International Alert and the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research, "[b]efore the outbreak of the [Donbas war] in 2014, there was little mention of violations, or threat of violation, of the rights of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine in reports by international organization missions, sociological surveys and official data on the satisfaction of needs for education, information and representation... The results of different sociological surveys included in the current research show that nothing prevented Russian-speaking Ukrainians from exercising their language and cultural rights, as well as the right to access information." International Alert and the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research, *Russophone Identity in Ukraine in the Context of the Armed Conflict in the East of the Country*, March 2017, http://www.ucipr.org.ua/publicdocs/Russophon_EN.pdf (accessed November 2019).

speakers."[7] The mendacity of Putin's remarks—which are regularly recycled by operatives up and down the corridors of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from Mariia Zakharova to Sergei Lavrov[8]—finds its oxygen in a longstanding stereotype of Ukraine as a country divided by languages, as beset by competing monolingualisms that corral "Russian-speaking Ukrainians" over here and "Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians" over there.[9] Attendant to this stereotype is a general disregard for the fragility, porosity, and ephemerality of such labels as well as for the very question of whether, when, and to what extent the "Russian-speaking population" is also in fact a "Ukrainian-speaking population."

This special section of the *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*—which emerges from a 2018 conference hosted by the research project "Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies" (MEITS) at the University of Cambridge[10]—

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7   Timothy Snyder, "Ukraine's Easy, Misunderstood Babel," *Politico.com*, 2 July 2015, https://www.politico.eu/article/crisis-in-ukraine-talk-shows-in-language-war (accessed November 2019).

8   Zakharova has accused Ukraine of "linguistic genocide," for instance. See "Zakharova zaiavila o 'iazykovom genotside' v Ukraine," *Gordon.ua*, 30 March 2017, https://gordonua.com/news/politics/zaharova-zayavila-o-yazykovom-genocide-v-ukraine-180922.html (accessed November 2019). Lavrov has spoken of defending "those who identify with the Russian language" in Donbas, envisioning "new bombings" if the Minsk Agreements are violated. See "Lavrov vystupaet na molodezhnov forume 'Territoriia smyslov na Kliaz'me,'" *YouTube*, 11 August 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ib9lvp2Ax2Q (accessed November 2019).

9   For varied examples of this stereotype in action since 2014, see Julia Ioffe, "Ukraine's Revolution Has Reached Its Climax," *The New Republic*, 22 February 2014, https://newrepublic.com/article/116720/ukraines-revolution-overthrows-yanukovich-heres-what-could-be-next (accessed November 2019); Max Fisher, "Everything You Need to Know about the Ukraine Crisis," *Vox*, 3 September 2014, https://www.vox.com/2014/9/3/18088560/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know (accessed November 2019); Tim Judah, *In Wartime: Stories from Ukraine* (London: Allen Lane, 2015); and Marvin Kalb, *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 132.

10   This conference received pivotal financial support from the project "Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies" (MEITS), led by the University of Cambridge and its partner institutions: University of Edinburgh, University of Nottingham, and Queen's University Belfast. MEITS

is in part a response to this "linguistic diversity as linguistic adversity" stereotype, which doggedly persists in spite of a vast body of scholarship in the social sciences on language use and language politics in Ukraine. It seeks a fresh approach to the study of Ukraine's multilingualism, especially in light of the dramatic events of the Euromaidan revolution and Ukraine's defence against Russian aggression. Rather than parsing sociological surveys or language legislation, which has been done expertly in a number of recent studies,[11] this special section delves into cultural expression— literature, film, popular music—with a keen interest in creative multilingual human agency and the lived linguistic experiences of the individual, from the nineteenth century to the present day. In other words, our focus is less on the macro-level "societal multilingualism" of Ukraine, which is the concern of laws, institutions, and linguistic standards, than on the micro-level "individual multilingualisms" of Ukrainians, who typically navigate, access, or employ more than one language over the course of a given day.

Attending to the individual multilingual subject is critical to an understanding of the very emergence of Ukraine as a modern political entity. In one sense, the origins of the modern Ukrainian national project in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be understood as a phenomenon of language acquisition, as a story of individuals not only being but also *becoming* multilingual. It is the story of Russophone members of the petty gentry like Mykola Kostomarov and Mariia Vilinskaia documenting, experimenting

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[11] See especially Volodymyr Kulyk, "National Identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (2016): 588–608; Kulyk, "Language and Identity in Ukraine after Euromaidan"; and Kulyk, "Identity in Transformation: Russian-Speakers in Post-Soviet Ukraine." See also Bureiko and Moga, "The Ukrainian–Russian Linguistic Dyad and Its Impact on National Identity in Ukraine." On language legislation, see Vladislava Reznik, "Language Policy in Independent Ukraine: A Battle for National and Linguistic Empowerment," *Language Planning in the Post-Communist Era: The Struggles for Language Control in the New Order in Eastern Europe, Eurasia and China*, ed. Ernest Andrews (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 169–92.

with, and publishing in the Ukrainian vernacular. Even more famously, it is the story of Ukrainophones from the peasantry like Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko studying and writing in the dominant language(s) of empire(s) as well as their native tongue. The civic nationalist movement that coalesced and matured in their footsteps accordingly mobilized ethnic Ukrainians as well as other ethnic groups—Russians, Poles, Jews, Crimean Tatars—around the idea of a political Ukraine fundamentally at odds with imperial power. And on the whole, this movement elevated and privileged the Ukrainian language without making language use a zero-sum game. When the Ukrainian People's Republic arose out of the rubble of the Russian Empire in 1917, for instance, its birth was announced on a broadsheet in four languages: Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and Yiddish.

Today, Ukraine's constitution enshrines Ukrainian as the state language while guaranteeing the "free development, use and protection" of Russian as well as the languages of national minorities. Across the country, these languages often live alongside each other, on top of each other and, in the Ukrainian-Russian non-standard hybrid known as *surzhyk*, even inside each other. As the poet Oleh Kotsarev notes, Ukraine is a country where each city, town, and street can have its own distinct linguistic culture. "In Ukraine it is absolutely normal," he observes, "to have two friends speaking different languages, or a husband and wife speaking different languages, or even a brother and sister speaking different languages."[12]

Why has this linguistic diversity been so often understood and projected as linguistic adversity? One primary reason is the post-Soviet practice among Ukrainian politicians and political technologists of exploiting language as an electoral cudgel to divide and rule and to distract from other, more intractable socioeconomic problems. Another pertains to what might be called the Valuev Effect—the aftermath of the seminal politicization of the Ukrainian

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[12] "Is Language a Boundary? The Case of Kharkiv, Ukraine," *YouTube*, 1 October 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb_dCRiDhkY&feature=emb_title (accessed 10 December 2019).

language in 1863, when the Russian Minister of the Interior Petr Valuev secretly banned its use in the everyday life of the Russian Empire. In the text establishing the rationale for the ban, Valuev conflated the fate of the Ukrainian language with the fate of the Ukrainian national movement, which, in his words, manifested "separatist designs hostile to Russia" *(separatistskie zamysly, vrazhdebnye k Rossii).*[13] By declaring infamously that "there has not been, is not, and can never be" a Ukrainian language, he sought to end the Ukrainian national project and deny any trajectories for its development. This draconian imperial measure, which was reinforced by Tsar Aleksandr II in the Ems ukase of 1876, ultimately failed, but its profound legacy in branding Ukrainian as politically "dangerous," diminishing its sociocultural status, and shackling it to the national project lingers to this day.

The epistemic violence wrought by the Valuev Effect turned brutally physical in the twentieth century, particularly in the Stalinist period. After an explosion of creative expression in the Ukrainian language under the Soviet *korenizatsiia* or "indigenization" policies of the 1920s and early 1930s, Stalin sparked a violent backlash that made Ukrainian cultural producers vulnerable to charges of "bourgeois nationalism," imprisonment, and execution due to their very choice of language. These repressed writers, artists, and intellectuals are a part of what is known today as Ukraine's "Executed Renaissance," whose abiding symbol is the Budynok "Slovo" (Building of the Word) in Kharkiv, a residence for cultural figures in the first capital of Soviet Ukraine that saw 90% of its occupants arrested, imprisoned, or shot.[14]

In the wake of this trauma, Ukrainian experienced a steady decline as a language of everyday life in Ukraine.[15] Soviet authorities

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[13]   Mikh. Lemke, *Epokha tsenzurnykh reform 1859–1865 godov* (St Petersburg: Tipo-lit. "Gerol'd," 1904), 303.

[14]   Olga Bertelsen, "The House of Writers in Ukraine, the 1930s: Conceived, Lived, Perceived," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, 2302 (September 2013), 6, https://carlbeckpapers.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/cbp/article/view/170/200 (accessed November 2019).

[15]   For views on this history informed by Irish, Canadian, Finnish, and other comparative examples, see Michael S. Flier and Andrea Graziosi (eds.), *The*

entrenched Russian as the language of interethnic communication, social mobility, and intellectual industry, fostering the perception of Ukrainian and other national languages as unnecessary beyond performances of national tradition and kitsch. Even in independent, sovereign Ukraine, this fraught past remains alive in the present, informing the defensive posture assumed by many cultural activists and policymakers and influencing the extent to which the use of the Ukrainian language is seen not only as a political act, but as an existential one.

Another reason for the framing of Ukraine's language diversity as language adversity is the predominance of what might be termed *territorialist discourse* in studies of its intricate linguistic ecosystem, whereby the variable of space—oblast, region, micro-region—is given analytical privilege over others. This discourse is, to an extent, a residue of imperial thinking. As Edward Said notes,

> Imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory. The geographical sense makes projections—imaginative, cartographic, military, economic, historical, or in a general sense cultural. It also makes possible the construction of various kinds of knowledge, all of them in one way or another dependent upon the perceived character and destiny of a particular geography.[16]

This territorialist discourse or "geographical sense" envelops our thinking in terms of the static rather than the fluid, offering us sociological polls whose findings are organized into columns by region and into rows by language, with little clarity as to how the percentages in the intersecting boxes refer to *individuals* who move within and across regions and between languages in daily life, often unconsciously. In 2014, as the war in Donbas unfolded, it led to a proliferation of countless bifurcated color-coded maps of Ukraine on television screens around the world, riven between a so-called

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Battle for Ukrainian: A Comparative Perspective (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[16]   Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 78.

"Russian-speaking east" and "Ukrainian-speaking west."[17] This elevation of the two dimensions of the map and the spreadsheet has often come at the expense of an understanding of the manifold dimensions of the individual Ukrainian subject. In the pages ahead, our contributors consider these dimensions from an array of disciplinary perspectives.

Our special section begins with the case of a characteristically multilingual and erudite nineteenth-century descendant of the Ukrainian Cossack elite: the lexicographer, translator, folklorist, ethnographer, poet, and "last historian of Ukraine as 'Little Russia,'" Mykola Markevych (1804–60). In "The Languages and Tongues of Mykola Markevych," Taras Koznarsky explores the ways in which Markevych selectively deploys the Ukrainian vernacular in his influential and "disruptive" Russian-language *Istoriia Malorossii* (*History of Little Russia*, 1842–43) not only to underscore cultural and political differences between Russians and Ukrainians, but also to endow the Ukrainian language with "charismatic historical power." Informed by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "the minor," Koznarsky presents Markevych as an emblematic example of a Ukrainian intellectual engaging in mimicry and dissimulation through the guise of the dominant language of empire, Russian.

In "Channel Switching: Language Change and the Conversion Trope in Modern Ukrainian Literature," Myroslav Shkandrij moves beyond Markevych's nineteenth century to reflect upon the multilingualism of modern Ukrainian literature more generally, with special concern for our contemporary moment. While noting that the "coexistence of two or more languages and their parallel use has often been the norm in Ukrainian literature," he surveys the longstanding practice among cultural figures like Maik Yohansen, Olena Teliha, and Valerii Ananiev of "switching the channel" to the Ukrainian language and examines what he calls the "conversion trope" in the prose of Leonid Mosendz, who was himself a "convert" from Russian. "These linguistic conversions in literature can be

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[17]   See, for instance, "A Divided Ukraine," *CNN.com*, 3 March 2014, https://edition. cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided/ (accessed November 2019).

symptomatic of an 'either-or' mentality," Shkandrij argues. "[Yet] Ukrainian literature is a means of exploring the cultural reality of Ukraine, for which either Ukrainian or Russian or Hungarian or other regional and minority languages of the country can be employed."

Laada Bilaniuk maintains this focus on the phenomenon of "linguistic conversion" in "Linguistic Conversion in Ukraine: Nation-Building on the Self," bringing an anthropological perspective to the growing trend of Ukrainians "switching from Russian to Ukrainian as part of a personal act of patriotism and contribution to nation-building" today. Informed by interviews and fieldwork conducted in 2009, 2016, and 2018, she reveals an array of factors motivating Ukraine's "linguistic converts," from works of Ukrainophone urban culture to acts of Russian aggression. Her case studies showcase the complex interplay between language, personal identity, and national identity among Ukrainians today and point to the increasing support of Ukrainian as a language of "civic belonging and sovereignty" in the wake of Euromaidan.

In "Ukrainian Cinema and the Challenges of Multilingualism: From the 1930s to the Present," Vitaly Chernetsky ushers us into the world of film and surveys the "frequently messy, contradictory practices of multilingualism" in Soviet Ukrainian and post-Soviet Ukrainian cinema, from the works of Ivan Kavaleridze to Myroslav Slaboshpyts'kyi. Arguing that contemporary Ukrainian cinema has "returned to the kind of diverse experimentation and plurality of approaches to multilingualism observable in the early 1930s," he outlines three main trends with respect to language use today. The first presents an entirely Ukrainophone world on screen; the second reflects Ukraine's linguistic landscape in all its complexity. Offering a compromise between these two is a third trend, which Chernetsky calls "strategic multilingualism," the practice of foregrounding Ukrainian and employing other languages on screen in order to affirm the privileged status of the state language while adequately representing Ukraine's linguistic diversity.

Iryna Shuvalova turns to popular music composed in response to the war in Donbas in her contribution, "'I Will Understand You, Brother, Just Like You Will Understand Me': Multilingualism in the

Songs of the War in Donbas." This understudied material makes evident the many ways in which the Russian and Ukrainian languages can occupy space in the same musical corpus, or the same song, or even the same line of lyrics at the same time—with divergent implications for audience reception. Surveying songs by predominantly Russophone Ukrainian and Ukrainophone Ukrainian singer-songwriters, Shuvalova sees two distinct approaches to multilingualism at play. The first incorporates the Ukrainian language in Russophone songs in order to perform and advance a pro-Ukrainian, civic nationalist position; the second incorporates the Russian language in Ukrainophone songs to perform and condemn Russian neo-imperial aggression and chauvinism.

Often lost amid the territorialist discourse prevailing in scholarship on the language question in Ukraine are the voices of individual Ukrainians themselves. To conclude this special section, we include two reports from ongoing research projects that, among other things, bring these voices to the fore: "Multilingualism in the Academy: Language Dynamics in Ukraine's Higher Education Institutions" by Olenka Bilash and "Language Use among Crimean Tatars in Ukraine: Context and Practice" by Alina Zubkovych. Bilash's contribution examines the use of language in Higher Educational Institutions in Ukraine since 2014. Presenting data and interview testimonials from focus groups with faculty and students in Kharkiv and L'viv, she reveals a nearly universal embrace of Ukrainian as the official language. Above all, she provides an outlet for students and scholars in Ukraine to describe—in their own words—the complexities of their multilingual environments as well as their approaches to overcoming obstacles in learning resource and research management.

While discussions of multilingualism in Ukraine understandably gravitate to a dominant Ukrainian and Russian bilingualism, we also wish to draw more attention to the experiences of Ukraine's national minorities, who often navigate between minority language, dominant language, and/or state language on a regular basis. As Alina Zubkovych makes clear in her report, the Crimean Tatars—a Sunni Muslim national minority recognized by

the Verkhovna Rada as an indigenous people of Ukraine—constitute a powerful case study. Her research focuses on the relationship between language and identity among the thousands of Crimean Tatars who have fled Crimea in the aftermath of the Russian annexation in 2014 for mainland Ukraine, where they constitute one of the largest groups of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the country. Drawing on interviews with displaced Crimean Tatars in Kyiv and L'viv, Zubkovych reveals a "visible asymmetry between Crimean Tatar linguistic practice and ethnic and political self-fashioning, whereby Russian, the predominant language of communication, is projected as a less desirable language in favour of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar."

The contributions to this special section of the *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* help us see Ukraine's multilingualism as a dynamic phenomenon of fluidity and diversity not easily captured in the aggregate on maps and charts or in statistical polling. They reveal our urgent need for a field of Ukrainian Studies "in three dimensions," attentive to Ukraine's distinctive historical and cultural development, supportive of interdisciplinary approaches to its study, and sensitive to the lives of individual Ukrainians at times of war and peace.