

Title: Imagining Communities: Use of Foreignisms by Ukrainian Radio

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Music and the linguistic repertoire of radio are important means of identity building. Song lyrics can create “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991) among people otherwise having no common ties. The present study explores identity projection and imagined community formation in Ukrainian society.

In Ukraine, facing a Ukrainian-Russian language schism, “what” is said became tightly interwoven with “how” it is said. I argue that foreignisms (such as English/Russian/Polish borrowings and codeswitches between Ukrainian and these languages) embedded into song lyrics create imagined communities among people living in different spatial dimensions (Eastern and Western Ukraine. Depending on the language nuances of the lyrics (English, Russian or a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian called “Surzhyk”), the radio will be transmitting a different sense of “who we are with” (Russia, Europe/Poland or “We-are-all-Ukrainians”) identity.

The results show two levels of identification. On the national level, mostly social and political matters are addressed: this can be explained by the active nation formation process happening today. Here Surzhyk is commonly used, helping to consolidate multilingual Ukrainian society. Traditional topics like love/emotions are mainly exploited on regional levels; this reflects the significant historical and cultural differences between Eastern and Western Ukraine that often prevent songs on these topics from being accepted by a nationwide audience. Most of the region-specific borrowings (such as Polish and Russian) are introduced on these regional levels.