



Contested Tongues: Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine

Laada Bilaniuk

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During the controversial 2004 elections that led to the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, cultural and linguistic differences threatened to break apart the country. *Contested Tongues* explains the complex linguistic and cultural politics in a bilingual country where the two main languages are closely related but their statuses are hotly contested. Laada Bilaniuk finds that the social divisions in Ukraine are historically rooted, ideologically constructed, and inseparable from linguistic practice. She does not take the labeled categories as givens but questions what "Ukrainian" and "Russian" mean to different people, and how the boundaries between these categories may be blurred in unstable times. Bilaniuk's analysis of the contemporary situation is based on ethnographic research in Ukraine and grounded in historical research essential to understanding developments since the fall of the Soviet Union. "Mixed language" practices (surzhyk) in Ukraine have generally been either ignored or reviled, but Bilaniuk traces their history, their social implications, and their accompanying ideologies. Through a focus on mixed language and purism, the author examines the power dynamics of linguistic and cultural correction, through which people seek either to confer or to deny others social legitimacy. The author's examination of the rapid transformation of symbolic values in Ukraine challenges theories of language and social power that have as a rule been based on the experience of relatively stable societies.

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