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## Language and identity in post-Soviet Moldova<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

The multilingual Republic of Moldova emerged from the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 as an example of the linguistic complications that can result from imperial domination and the mobility associated with political change. The study draws on historical, survey, and ethnographic data to illustrate the complexity of the accessible language and social identities in the emergent country. Among the issues discussed are the status of Russian, the argument over the status of Moldovan as an independent language or a dialect of Romanian, and the role of English as an international language in Moldova's globalizing culture and economy. Trends in the survey data are both reinforced and challenged by the ethnographic data. In conclusion, I argue that the linguistic identity crisis in Moldova seems far from resolution, even though some reasons for hope can be identified.

### **Introduction**

This study investigates the crisis in linguistic and national identity that affects the multilingual Republic of Moldova. About two-thirds of Moldovans speak a dialect of Romanian that has been highly politicized in recent history. Focusing on the contentious arguments over their linguistic identity both during and after the Soviet period, I argue that the persistent notion of a separate Moldovan language is rooted both in an ancient Moldovanism that predates nineteenth-century Romanian nation-building and in Moscow's exploitation of this identity during the Soviet era. Survey data that illustrates the balanced status of Romanian/Moldovan and Russian in the country today provide a connection between Moldova's troubled past and its present identity crisis.

The connection between linguistic and national identities has been a common theme in the sociolinguistic investigation of nation-building and nationalism. Joshua Fishman's (1973) essays on this topic serve as the field's seminal works. However, ideas and theories related to this topic have been carried off in many directions: polemical, philosophical, empirical, ethnographic,

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among others. For instance, Safran asserts that ‘a nation of purely “political” essence is a fantasy... for in order for the “political” to do its work, there must be an identitive readiness that is based on psychological and cultural foundations’ (1999:91). He goes on to pick out linguistic markers as the most salient form of such foundations in individual interactions. These individual interactions are the specific object of ethnographic studies such as Miller (1999), which develops a model of enacted identity comprised of context, language use, and group membership. Through ethnographic data about a group of non-English-speaking, immigrant schoolchildren in Australia, Miller argues that ‘the important link between second language use and social identity must be seen in its relation to empowerment, being heard, and the ongoing process of self-realisation’ (1999:163). In a multilingual society, the status of the individual depends crucially upon that individual’s access to and proficiency in the language(s) of highest status within the national context. In Moldova, the notions of national context and the status of competing languages have been subjected to instability by recent and more distant historical events. The roots of ancient Moldovanism are still productive today because of two historical phenomena. The first involves Russian claims to the territory. Originally annexed by imperial Russia in 1812, the Moldovan territory east of the Prut River remained isolated during the entire process of Romanian nation-building that affected western Romanian-speaking territories (King 1999:49). Because of this, it did not participate in the consolidation and Latinization of the standard Romanian language. The second involves the impoverished, rural character of the Moldovans. During the Tsarist occupation, new urban and industrial areas were intentionally populated with russophone and germanophone minorities. As a result, the few Romanian speakers with access to education and political power were forced to adopt Russian, while the majority remained powerless peasants. These peasants maintained the ancient Moldovan identity, due to their forced exclusion from both Romanian and Russian identities.

Before and during the Soviet period, the peasant’s notion of ancient Moldovanism was exploited by the irredentist policies of Moscow toward the region, which had been unified with Romania after World War I. The propagation of a separate Moldovan language, using the Cyrillic script, was a central policy through much of this period. Despite this policy, however, the so-called Moldovan language never gained full functionality, because urbanized speakers of the so-called language were still encouraged to shift to Russian. As such, the notion of ancient Moldovanism was revived in modern, Soviet clothing.

### **Post-Soviet Identities**

Due to this colonial heritage, the national identities of Moldovans at independence in 1991 took many forms: staunchly Romanian, staunchly Russian, and several notions of moderate Moldovan identity. This section of the study contains data from a survey of 124 students and young professionals in the capital, Chişinău. The data presented here relate primarily to social identity and its relation to language use. I will begin with a brief overview of the recent ethno-linguistic context.

Table I.  
1989 Soviet census data on nationality groups in Moldova and their L1s and L2s (%)

Nationality	Population	%	L1 Self	L1 Moldovan	L1 Russian	L2 Moldovan	L2 Russian
Moldovans	2,794,749	64.5	95.4	(95.4)	3.3	1.7	53.1
Ukrainians	600,366	13.8	61.6	1.6	36.7	12.8	43.0
Russians	562,069	13.0	99.1	0.6	(99.1)	11.7	0.6
Gagauz	153,458	3.5	91.2	1.1	7.4	4.4	72.8
Bulgarians	88,419	2.0	78.7	2.4	18.1	6.9	68.3
Jews	65,672	1.5	25.9	0.8	72.9	15.2	23.1
Roma	11,571	0.3	82.0	13.5	3.6	30.6	41.9
Other	56,579	1.4	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	4,335,360	100	88.9	62.0	23.2	3.9	44.6

The Soviet census of 1989 provides the most recent demographic statistics for the country, some of which are presented in Table I (compiled from Karasik 1992, Gordon 1993 and King 1999). The census collected self-reported data on nationality and linguistic fluency. The notion of nationality in the Soviet Union was explicit and official, appearing in each citizen's identity card and passport. In addition, following official policy, Romanian and Moldovan were included as two different national identities. As such, there were only about two thousand Romanians counted in Moldova in 1989. Any local Romanians were counted as Moldovan. Similarly, many of the smaller minorities such as urbanized Ukrainians and Jews were likely counted as Russians, this being a more prestigious category to belong to, particularly for fully assimilated urbanites and those from multiethnic families. Because of these and other limitations, census data are often incomplete or inaccurate in unpredictable ways. These limitations of the data notwithstanding, the trends represented here remain relevant as a foundation for understanding the complexity of the country's ethno-linguistic identity dynamics.

As can be seen in Table I, self-identifying Moldovans made up almost two-thirds of the population in 1989, with Ukrainians and Russians competing for a distant second. Although the number of Jews has decreased significantly since independence, due to emigration, other groups have been fairly stable. There has also been a fair amount of economically motivated and often illegal emigration to the West, but this has likely affected all groups relatively equally. The statistics about language identification and second language (L2) proficiency have probably been less stable. The column marked 'L1 Self' gives the percentage of citizens who claimed a first

language (L1) with the same name as their nationality. For instance, the 'L1 Self' for Bulgarian nationals would be Bulgarian, while for Jews it would be Yiddish, etc. In 1989, almost all Moldovan nationals (95.4%) identified their L1 as Moldovan, with only a few (3.3%) who had shifted to Russian. However, more than half of Moldovans did claim fluency in L2 Russian. Russian nationals, on the other hand, very rarely shifted to Moldovan (0.6%) and also rarely spoke L2 Moldovan fluently (11.7%). Similarly, the other national minorities, aside from the Roma, tended to shift to or adopt L2 Russian rather than Romanian. For instance, among the Gagauz, only 5.5% had some fluency in Moldovan while 80.2% had developed fluency in Russian, either as L1 (7.4%) or L2 (72.8%).

The preference to learn Russian among minorities reflected the symbolic and institutional status of Russian during the Soviet period. The urban-rural split was also significant, with Russian spoken in the cities and national languages spoken in rural areas. For instance, although 3.3% and 53.1% of all Moldovan nationals had shifted to L1 Russian and acquired it as an L2, respectively, the percentages of assimilated Moldovans in the capital city were much higher, with 11% shifted and 74% fluent as an L2. Moreover, Gordon (1993:135) shows that the linguistic russification of Moldovan nationals increased dramatically in the two decades before independence, with a 13.6% increase in Russian fluency between 1970 and 1979 followed by a more moderate 7.2% increase between 1979 and 1989. This trend has abated significantly since independence, because Romanian now enjoys a status almost equal to Russian in many areas, particularly institutional. In contrast, the ethnic Russian adoption of the Romanian language remains low, although it has certainly increased somewhat. As a result of the linguistic russification of both Moldovan and other non-Russian nationals in the country, Russian had by 1989 become somewhat more widely spoken than Moldovan (Romanian). Looking at the totals in Table I, one can see that Moldovan was spoken by 65.9% of the population as either an L1 (62%) or an L2 (3.9%), while Russian was spoken by 67.8% (with 23.2% L1 and 44.6% L2). In addition, Russian was still much more highly valued, based on its prestige as an international, cultured language. As mentioned, it was also the language of the urban elites.

However, after 1989 the national and linguistic identities in the country began to shift radically. Perestroika led to the revival of the Romanian identity and demands by both Romanian and Moldovan identity groups for more power in the political, economic, and cultural markets of the country. The language laws of August 31, 1989, recognized the identical linguistic character of Romanian and Moldovan, returned official use of the language in the country to the Latin alphabet, and made it the sole official language. The apparent radicalism of this pro-Romanian movement led to an even more radical, violent reaction from the Russian-speaking minorities in the eastern region of Transnistria and the southern area of Gagauzia after the independence of 1991. Democratization of politics starting in 1994 led to moderation of the pro-Romanian ideology among leaders in Chişinău, but the break-away status of Transnistria, where the Russian army remains in a nominally peace-keeping role, has remained unresolved. In 2003, Moldova is ruled by a democratically-elected, revived Communist party that propagates the old Soviet policies of russification and Moldovan distinctiveness. But, more than a decade of non-Communist rule have established the pro-Romanian opposition as a permanent alternative in politics and identity choices. Although many still argue that Russian should be a second official language (because 'everyone' speaks it, as the ideology maintains), 'Moldovan' is still the only official language in the country's Constitution. At the same time, most educated, urban Moldovans will acknowledge that Romanian and Moldovan are the same language, even if they still refer to it from time to time as Moldovan. As I will show in greater detail below, the

national identity of Moldovans as separate from Romanians or Russians has been largely accepted, but cultural, particularly linguistic, identities have been much more contentious. Article 13 of the 1994 Constitution concerns the national language and the use of other languages in the country. The official translation into English reads:

- (1) The national language of the Republic of Moldova is Moldovan, and its writing is based on the Latin alphabet.
- (2) The Moldovan State acknowledges and protects the right to preserve, develop and use the Russian language and other languages spoken within the national territory of the country.
- (3) The State will encourage and promote studies of foreign languages enjoying widespread international usage.
- (4) The use of languages in the territory of the Republic of Moldova will be established by organic law.

Noteworthy here is that the term ‘Moldovan’ is used to the exclusion of ‘Romanian’ and that the Russian language is the only other language named explicitly. This draws out both the dominant roles of these two languages in the country and the contentiousness over which label to use for the national language. In order to clarify these issues, I will consider how languages are distinguished and identified in a national context like Moldova.

A language can be identified based on three criteria: structural differences, distinctions in social or national group membership, and differences in the value associated with them. The Moldovan dialect of Romanian does have several structural features that mark it as potentially distinct from standard Romanian. Many common words with labial consonants in initial position in standard Romanian are pronounced with non-labial equivalents in the Moldovan dialect. As a result, rural Moldovans will say /gine/ for standard /bine/ (in English, ‘well’), /kiʃware/ for /pitʃware/ (‘legs’), and /njere/ for /mjere/ (‘honey’). In addition, unstressed vowels are more commonly centralized toward schwa than in the standard variety. The lexicon of Moldovan also varies somewhat from standard Romanian. For example, rural Moldovans often say *curec* instead of the standard *varză* (‘cabbage’). Some other examples are *pepeni* for *castraveți* (‘cucumbers’) and *nică* for *nimic* (‘nothing’). These words are all simple regional variants. However, there are a number of other lexical differences based on borrowings from Russian. These include the Moldovan use of *creșlă* for standard Romanian *fotoliu* (‘armchair’), *butilcă* for *sticlă* (‘bottle’), and *cran* for *robinet* (‘faucet’). However, few of these variations were actually integrated into the standard Moldovan promoted by the Soviet authorities, because they were associated too closely with the powerless spoken varieties of the rural peasants. Therefore, the standard Moldovan promoted throughout the Soviet period was essentially identical to standard Romanian with the exception of the alphabet and the use of Russian, rather than French, borrowings for technical terminology. As such, the structural criterion for distinguishing the languages disappeared with the introduction of the Latin alphabet in 1989 and the opening of the border with Romania in 1990 (Dyer 1999).

It is worth noting that a last remnant of the Cyrillic alphabet remains in some written forms of Romanian in Moldova. This remnant concerns the choice between the graphemes <î> and <â>, which both represent the high, central, unrounded vowel [i], a sound common to Slavic but not to other Romance languages. In standard Romanian, both graphemes appear in a distribution that allows the Latin roots of the language to be apparent. For instance, <î> is used in words like *în*

('in'), where an <i> or <e> appears in French, Italian, and Spanish cognates. But, <â> is used in words like *pâine* ('bread'), where the <a> would appear in western Romance languages. In Moldova, on the other hand, many street signs and written forms of Romanian avoid the <â> altogether. A typical example is the spelling *pîine* on bread shops. The <î> more closely resembles the Russian grapheme for the same sound, <ы>. This avoidance of <â> reflects an anti-Romanian and pro-Russian ideology, because it preserves an element of the Slavic appearance and eschews the Latinate.

The second criterion used to identify a language, the one involving social group distinctions, is clearly present for Moldovan and Romanian. However, language is an aspect of national identity that tends to need deeper roots than other aspects. Because of this, North Americans still refer to their language as English rather than as American or Canadian, even though their national identity is clearly American or Canadian. Similarly, Austrians call their language German and many Belgians call theirs French. Just as the Belgians have with regard to French, Moldovans may have developed a national identity separate from Romania in the two centuries of isolation, but their language goes back much further. For that reason, many Moldovans who call themselves Moldovan nationals will still call their language Romanian (Crowther 1996). However, for the same reason, the notion of ancient Moldovan that was preserved during the two century isolation continues to support a separate Moldovan linguistic identity, one which has been reinforced by Soviet propaganda. As a result, the social criterion produces two competing identities for the indigenous people of Moldova: ancient Moldovanism, valorized by Soviet ideology, or modern Romanianism.

Finally, the criterion of status, or value, also draws a clear distinction between Romanian and Moldovan. Standard Romanian is a language rich in literary and scientific traditions. Of course, it has not had this status as long as many other European languages and is not widely adopted as an L2, but it is certainly multi-functional and thriving. Moldovan, on the other hand, borrowed the Romanian classics for its literature and never achieved much use as a scientific and technical language, despite Soviet efforts and claims (Korletianu 1979:5). On the contrary, Moldovan remained fairly limited functionally (Bruchis 1988). I have discussed the patterns of shift to Russian, particularly in the urban areas during Soviet times. This shift was facilitated by the unequal status of Russian and Moldovan. Russian was promoted by the Soviets as the language of international communication and the language of the revolutionary vanguard. As a symbol of imperial power, Russian was widely adopted in the Soviet empire by minority groups like the Moldovans, whose own language was far less prestigious and valuable in economic and political markets. Because of this, languages like Moldovan, although promoted as national languages, lost significant ground, both functionally and in sheer numbers of speakers, to Russian.

In essence, Moldovan was always the basilect, i.e. the low-status, intimate language, in a diglossic relationship with dominant Russian. This low prestige is also apparent in the attitudes of those who identify with a standard Romanian linguistic identity toward the Moldovan dialect and Russian borrowings. In conclusion, the notion of a separate Moldovan language is sustainable only based on the criterion of social group distinctions, since low status is not a justification for language maintenance in a contemporary, democratic society.

## **A Survey of Identity and Language Use**

In this study, I examine three self-identified L1 groups: Romanian, Moldovan, and Russian. The other linguistic minorities, such as Ukrainian, Gagauz, and Bulgarian, exist in much smaller numbers in Moldova and primarily in the rural areas. The L1 Romanian and Russian groups are distinguished by all three criteria related to language identification. They are structurally different, associated with distinct ethno-national social groups, and highly valued in their respective linguistic markets. The inclusion of Moldovan as a separate L1 is based on the association of many Moldovans with this linguistic identity, presumably based on social group distinctions. I will also consider these three languages as L2s. Although many Moldovans are bilingual, their bilingualism varies in degree. Most, when pressed, will associate more strongly with one national language than with another. For this reason, even when a bilingual learned both languages from childhood and is fairly balanced in competence, I will consider the language with strongest group associations the L1 and the other an L2.

Finally, I will be studying the role of L2 English in Moldova. The English language is widely seen as a source of economic and cultural development for the struggling peoples of eastern Europe. This belief has been criticized as imperialistic and deceptive, benefitting the interests of Western powers (Phillipson 1992, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1997:39-40). Even given this role, belief in the power and status of English is apparent in Moldova, driven by the perceived and, thereby, actual necessity of English competence for access to the meager economic opportunities in the small private sector (Ciscel 2002b). Many urban Moldovans are more motivated to learn L2 English than the local L2 of their neighbors. In other words, caught between the old empire of the East and the new empire of the West, Moldovans scramble to determine not only their own identity, but how outside identities will influence them in the process. Ironically, the East-West struggle in Moldova has been a stalemate, producing disruptively balanced numbers of Russian, Moldovan, and Romanian social and linguistic identities.

In a survey conducted in 2001, 124 respondents at four educational institutions and two private companies, all in the capital city, provided information about their language uses and attitudes. The ages of respondents ranged from 15 to 46 with a mean of 21.3. The lower-end skew apparent in these age figures is attributed to the fact that most respondents were university students. The sample is hardly representative of Moldovans as a whole, even though it does capture the character of the well-educated, professionally oriented urbanites. The data appear in Table II.

Table II.  
Cross-tabulation of self-reported national identity and L1 in survey subjects

Nat ID \ L1	<i>Moldovan</i>	<i>Romanian</i>	<i>Russian</i>	TOTAL
<i>Moldovan</i>	<b>29</b> (4mx)	39 (2mx)	14 (11mx)	82 (17mx)
<i>Romanian</i>		<b>17</b>		17
<i>Russian</i>	1 (1mx)	1 (1mx)	<b>13</b> (7mx)	15 (9mx)
<i>Ukrainian</i>			7 (4mx)	7 (4mx)
<i>Gagauz</i>			1 (1mx)	1 (1mx)
<i>None</i>		1	1	2
TOTAL	30 (5mx)	58 (3mx)	36 (23mx)	124 (31mx)

About two-thirds of respondents chose a Moldovan national identity. The remainder are concentrated in groups of Romanians with L1 Romanian and Russians or other minorities with L1 Russian. But, exceptional outliers also appear. These include two self-described Russians, one with L1 Moldovan and the other with L1 Romanian. Similarly, they are both from mixed families, as indicated by the number in parentheses with ‘mx.’ However, the majority of mixed families, by almost three to one, produced L1 Russian speakers. Also, two respondents chose not to identify with any nationality at all.

As seen above, self-reported national identity categories do not necessarily reflect the complexity of multiple social identity categories available to the individual (for further discussion see Safran 1999, McNamara 1997). For this reason, I developed an algorithm to determine an identity score based on responses to several items on the survey questionnaire, including self-reported location, kinship, and attitude factors. Each factor was placed on a scale from -2 (very Russian) to 2 (very Romanian) and then integrated into the composite identity score as follows: 30% location of birth and childhood, 20% linguistic kinship (L1s of parents), 40% political attitude related to a series of issues in Moldova, and 10% by the language the questionnaire was filled out in. Further details of this calculation can be found in Ciscel (2002a).

The overall social identity score for each respondent fell in the range between -2 and 2. In order to establish categories, this range is divided into four equal parts: scores 1 to 2 are extremely pro-Romanian (XRO), scores 0 to 1 are moderately pro-Romanian (MRO), scores -1 to 0 are moderately pro-Russian (MRU), and scores -2 to -1 extremely pro-Russian (XRU). This approach neatly separates the more extreme identity stances from the centralized, multi-cultural population in the Moldovan context. It further separates the middle into Slavic and Latinate oriented branches. The counts of social identity score and L1 appear in Table III.

Although artificial and, to a certain extent, arbitrary, the identity scores and categories both



reflect the complexity of the phenomenon and more convincingly represent the range of political ideologies available in the national context. The extremely pro-Romanian group ( $>1$  XRO) primarily contains L1 Romanian speakers. Furthermore, all members are from unmixed families and tend to hold more extreme political views. The moderately pro-Romanian group ( $0 < 1$  MRO) contains a balance of L1 Moldovan and Romanian, including many of those from mixed families in these L1 groups. The moderately pro-Russian group ( $-1 < 0$  MRU) is more problematic. It is made up of 23 L1 Russian speakers, many from mixed families, and seven L1 Moldovan speakers. To reflect the L1 difference, this group is further divided into two groups for analysis in this study. The seven L1 Moldovan speakers are categorized as assimilated, or russified, Romanians (ARO), while the 23 L1 Russian speakers remain in the MRU category. Finally, the thirteen respondents who fall into the extremely pro-Russian group ( $< -1$  XRU) are less likely to come from a mixed family and tend to hold more extreme political views. A separate group of L1 Russian speakers with an identity score greater than zero does not occur in the data. In sum, I have proposed five categories of social identity (the four in Table III, plus the extra ARO group discussed above) that both reflect the backgrounds and attitudes of the respondents and divide them into salient identity groups. The categories, from most pro-Romanian to most pro-Russian, are (1) XRO, (2) MRO, (3) ARO, (4) MRU, and (5) XRU. The categories also subsume L1 identities, since a chi-square of the data in Table III indicates significant correlation between identity and L1 groups (176.193,  $df=12$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

Table III.  
Cross-tabulation of identity ranges and L1

ID \ L1	<i>Romanian</i>	<i>Moldovan</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Ukrainian</i>	TOTAL
$>1$ XRO	34	1			35
$0 < 1$ MRO	24 (3mx)	22 (3mx)			46 (6mx)
$-1 < 0$ MRU		7 (2mx)	23 (19mx)		30 (21mx)
$< -1$ XRU			12 (4mx)	1	13 (4mx)
TOTAL	58 (3mx)	30 (5mx)	35 (23mx)	1	124 (31mx)

This categorization has both weaknesses and strengths. The greatest weakness is that the categories are artificial, in that they do not reflect any one particular membership choice actually made by the respondents. Insofar as measurement of such an actual choice is even possible, however, the artificial score is composed of several different scores that do reflect the respondents' actual positions, at least as reported in the context of the survey. By balancing several related measures of attitude and identity, the score, although artificial, is able to triangulate and estimate a closer approximation of an actual, holistic identity than a single item, such as nationality. Therefore, the weakness of artificiality can also be interpreted as a strength in that the score is a composite.

Even so, the particular weighting of the aspects and the division of final scores into categories

can be criticized as arbitrary. Certainly, these processes were arbitrary. However, the resulting categories appear to represent well the salient categories of group membership on the ground in Moldova. For example, as discussed, extremist views at each end of the Romanian-Russian identity spectrum tend to be occupied by small, powerful groups of relative elites. This dynamic is captured in the scores. Also, the L1 and mixed family groups are neatly divided along a continuum by the scoring algorithm. Finally, the projection of identity categories along this continuum captures the individual variation and apparent ease of shifting among groups by adjusting a score up or down a few points in one direction or the other. In sum, although imperfect and likely, at times, inaccurate for particular individuals, the composite identity scores and categories proposed here are more powerful variables than national or linguistic identity alone. As such, their use in the study is justified.

The pattern of language use reported across the 124 subjects in the survey appears in Figure 1. The data presented here involve a composite score based on responses to a series of questions about frequency of language use in various social contexts and with different interlocutors. The points on the graph represent the degree of use of one language compared to another across the established social identity groups. For instance, the XRO group uses its L1 Romanian just more than 50% (1 degree) more often than L2 Russian. The same group uses L2 Russian and English equally often (0). Also, the XRU group uses L2 Romanian less often than English (-0.25 degree). The differences among identity groups for both L1 to local L2 and local L2 to English are highly significant ( $p=0.000$  for each, based on one-way ANOVAs).

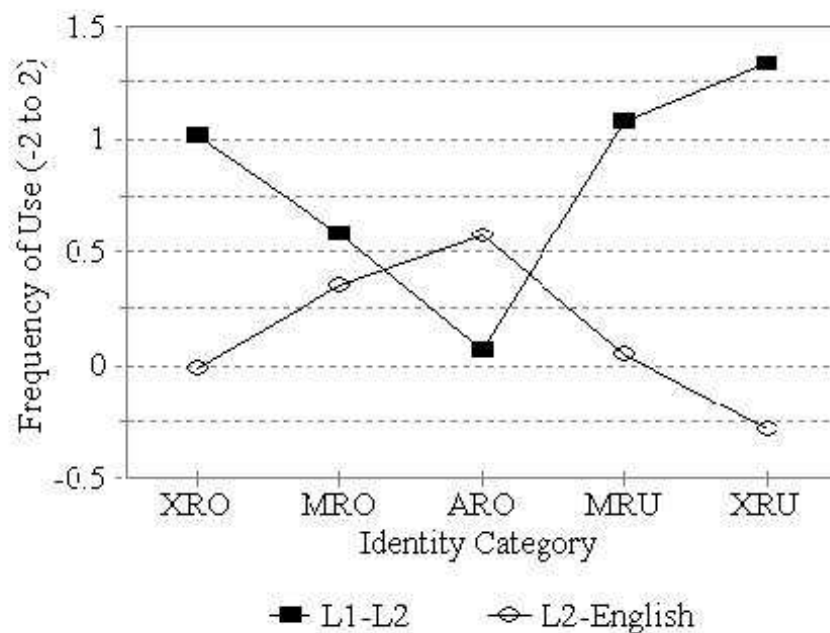


Figure 1: Differences in frequency of use of L1 to local L2 and local L2 to English by identity category

The general patterns reveal that members of the extremist XRO and XRU categories use their respective L1s much more often than the local L2, as would seem logical. In addition, they tend to use the local L2 and English equally often, despite the non-local status of English. Notably, the XRU members are more extreme than those in XRO, whose use is actually very similar to that of the MRU category on the L1 Russian side. The members of the MRO category use their L2 Russian fairly often, although not as often as their L1 Romanian. Correspondingly, they use L2 Russian much more often than English. This tendency is even more extreme in the members of the small ARO category, where Romanian and Russian use are almost balanced and English is used much less often than L2 Russian.

During the fieldwork, I had greater access to three groups of students at the State University of Moldova than to other subjects, because I had volunteered to teach an essay writing class once a week to each group during the Fall Semester of 2001. Because this was an optional class without a grade, attendance was low and sporadic. However, a few students in each of the three groups attended regularly, allowing me to get to know them well. Six of them also volunteered to do an individual interview and to fill out an additional questionnaire about their language proficiency. The stories of these six students of English translation flesh out the skeletal statistics of the broader survey. One of these ethnography subjects will be presented here in detail in order to illustrate the complexity of individual experience suggested by the above quantified data.

Lidia (a pseudonym) was categorized as belonging to the MRO group in this study. Her identity score was 0.467, based primarily on her claims to Moldovan rather than Romanian national and linguistic identity. She was raised in the capital city of Moldova, but with parents who she reports to be L1 Moldovan speakers. Her access to and acquisition of L2 Russian were earlier and more complete than for many of the XRO subjects. In the second year of school, at age 8, she began formal lessons in Russian, which continued throughout the remaining ten years in school, averaging three hours per week. She also reported using some Russian from an early age with neighbors and speaking it often with schoolmates after the age of 8. Even so, she reported using Russian regularly with only about ten percent of friends and family, primarily with neighbors and a few distant relatives. Lidia's use of L2 Russian in the contexts reported on the first questionnaire is more frequent than that of the other L1 Romanian subjects in the ethnography. In addition, her Russian was reported and tested at the highest proficiency of any L2 among the six subjects.

Lidia reported great ease with her L2 Russian in a range of functions and tested without errors on a written cloze test in that language. In contrast, her L2 English was similar to that of the other L1 Romanian subjects, quite proficient but not like her L1. Unlike her colleagues, Lidia began learning English only at the university, at age 17. Like the others, she had had almost five years of formal instruction in the L2, several hours per week. Her reported grades (around 9 out of 10) were as good as any student who had studied English in school. She has apparently been quite immersed in the language since entering the university. She reported beginning to use the language informally with other students in the third year, when she was 19. As a result, her score on the cloze test was also quite good for L2 English: 2.7/3.0. Having learned L2 Russian early and grown up essentially bilingual, Lidia seems to take to learning L2s naturally. During the interview, she said that learning Russian had indeed come 'naturally,' because all around her, in the street and even sometimes at home, people spoke it. She emphasized that learning Russian 'had never been a problem.' But, she also claimed that English had been easier than Russian. Like her classmates, she said that the grammar of English was much easier and that she wished

she had more opportunities to speak it, to gain fluency. In other words, she saw lack of access as the primary obstacle to her acquisition of English.

Despite her proficiency in both L2s, Lidia made consistent statements that reinforced her strong connection to L1 Moldovan (Romanian). She claimed to dream primarily in Moldovan and rejected outright any possibility of Russian as a second official language in Moldova. Although she thinks learning Russian is a good idea for Moldovans, she does not think that it should be mandatory. When asked about the recent attempts by the Communists to make Russian official, she predicted correctly that the Romanian nationalists and the people in general would not tolerate it. Indeed, for several months following the interview, the pro-Romanian Christian Democratic party held daily protests against russification in the streets and in the courts, ultimately winning in the latter. For Lidia, this was inevitable. But unlike many nationalists, she remained positive about L1 Russian speakers in Moldova and about the need for Russian to maintain a de facto leading role, even in the absence of de jure official status.

Given her proficiency in and frequent use of L2 Russian, Lidia's rejection of official status for the language seemed peculiar. Once during class, the topic of official Russian came up<sup>2</sup>. The one L1 Russian speaker in the group argued that Russian needed to be made official, drawing an unfortunate comparison to the role of French in France's former colonies in Africa. More surprising than her willingness to make such a statement in front of a group of L1 Romanian colleagues was the simple acceptance of the idea of official status for Russian among these colleagues. With only one exception, everyone present that day, including an XRO group member, agreed that giving Russian official status would be acceptable or at least possible. Lidia was the only one of the half dozen L1 Romanian speakers who rejected the idea outright, in front of everyone. The various contradictions and hypocrisies wrapped up in this situation can only be explained by idiosyncratic aspects of social and linguistic identity. It is perhaps because of the precarious status of her L1, which she identifies as Moldovan rather than Romanian, that she was so willing to defend her position. Similarly, her XRO colleague, with the weight of Romania and its history behind her L1, likely did not feel that it was as necessary to defend the status of her L1 so virulently. Whatever the motives, it is clear from this episode that individuals often behave in unpredictable ways with regard to identity. From a set of unpredictable practices, one can, at times, identify patterns that reflect the spirit of a group, community, or nation.

Upon reflection, I should not have been shocked by the way the above scene played out. What was shaken by the discourse was more my own sense of idealism and justice than my impressions about how people interact concerning linguistic identity issues in Moldova. In fact, the scene reinforced many stereotypes that I have drawn from daily life there and tried, as a researcher, to resist. L1 Russian speakers often state their opinions directly, with the arrogance of one bestowed with privilege and advantage. In a group, L1 Romanian speakers generally do not resist. Those who do resist are sometimes marked, ironically, as arrogant or extremist by L1 Russian speakers. These are the mechanics of domination. I can imagine them working quite well in Soviet times. However, the illustration above is only an artifact of those times, an artifact that continues to surface at times, but one which is also often counterbalanced by L1 Romanian nationalists, who are often more assertive than the one present in this interaction, and, at times, even by moderate Moldovans like Lidia, who stand on the threshold of language shift to Russian but refuse to enter.

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<sup>2</sup> This conversation was, unfortunately, not recorded. Therefore, the details of the interchange are based purely on my recollection and notes taken at the end of the lesson.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have proposed a set of social identity categories to be used in the analysis of the Moldovan context. Although the use of fixed, rigid identity categories contradicts the potentially fluid and volatile nature of social identities, the five categories described here are intended as approximations that will allow some control of the analysis of identity and language use phenomena. Despite the fact that individual subjects are discussed as members of particular categories, based on their identity scores, the multiple and complex character of these identities and the freedom of individuals to deviate at times from the program of their category are also assumed. These dynamic elements are captured by the representation of the range of identities as a continuum and by the focus on the complex social and linguistic practices of individual subjects. In sum, the categories established here are a convenience that facilitates analysis. The results from these analyses should be understood as occurring within the context of variability and individual differences that become evident with parallel, qualitative analyses. As such, the categories are proposed as soft guideposts to the stories of language and identity practices that are suggested by the brief introduction to Lidia.

Overall, the results show a pattern of language use that is deeply rooted in historical developments and recent social changes. The identities represent present instantiations of that history and those changes. As such, the patterns of reported language use illustrate the stalemate in struggles for national and cultural identity today in the Republic of Moldova. The prognosis for resolution of these issues is unclear, depending on both internal and external politics and, perhaps more than anything else, on the economic and social dynamics in the everyday lives of individual Moldovans like Lidia. The relative stability and moderation of the past decade provides some hope for an eventual resolution of the crisis in linguistic identity. However, persistent poverty and political extremism remain dangerous barriers to resolution of the crisis. The ultimate outcomes are relevant not only to Moldovans but to members of emergent national communities all over Europe and the world that are grappling with multilingualism and histories of colonization, for example the Scottish in Britain, the Corsicans in France (Jaffe 1999), the Catalan speakers of Spain (Woolard 1989), and countless others. For members of these communities, like for the Moldovans, language and social identity are inextricably linked in the experiences and challenges of national self-determination and individual self-realization.

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