

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0936

EDN: GFJDXG

УДК: 81'27

Impact of Language Ideologies on Language Practices in Pridnestrovie

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Received 22.03.2022, received in revised form 02.06.2022, accepted 17.08.2022

Abstract. Over the last 30 years Pridnestrovie, a *de facto* independent state in the post-Soviet space, has remained one of the few countries in the world where the Russian language is not only widely used but still enjoys the official status. This article aims to explain what factors have led to the current state of affairs. First, the paper provides a historical background of the region in the 19th century when the community of people from different ethnic backgrounds, which Pridnestrovie represents now, was formed. Then, following the theoretical framework of language ideologies, the present paper analyses the issues of language policy during the Soviet period and the impact they have had on the contemporary language attitudes people of the region hold now. In addition, the study outlines the language legislation of Pridnestrovie that secures linguistic pluralism in the country in theory but is more of a symbolic value in practice. Drawing on the analysis of quantitative data, obtained from 135 online questionnaires, we argue that the ethnic identity of the respondents drives, to a large degree, the decision to select particular languages as their mother tongue(s), which is, however, not the case when it comes to the question about the ethnicity of the participants. Additionally, it appears that the top-down imposition of language ideologies has influenced the participants' language attitudes and their beliefs about the role the Russian language plays in the republic, especially in the sphere of education, career and the maintenance of interethnic peace in the region.

Keywords: language ideology, language attitudes, Pridnestrovie, Russian language, multilingualism, identity.

Research area: linguistics.

The article was prepared within the framework of the Academic Fund Program at HSE University in 2020–2021 (grant № 20–04–019) and within the framework of the Russian

Academic Excellence Project «5–100». The Research Group “Language practices in the context of ethnocultural diversity” <https://www.hse.ru/ma/langpolicy/multiling/>

Citation: Tulum, A. S. and Zubalov, D. Yu. (2022). Impact of language ideologies on language practices in pridnestrovie. J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci., 15(11), 1552–1572. DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0936



Влияние языковых идеологий на языковые практики в Приднестровье

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Аннотация. В течение последних 30 лет Приднестровье, de facto независимое государство на постсоветском пространстве, остаётся одной из немногих территорий в мире, где русский язык не только широко используется, но и по-прежнему имеет официальный статус. Цель данной статьи – объяснить, какие факторы привели к формированию текущей языковой ситуации в регионе. Прежде всего в работе рассматривается историческая перспектива, а именно XIX век, когда на территории современного Приднестровья сложилось то многоязычное и полиэтническое сообщество, которое проживает в республике сегодня. Далее в рамках концепции языковых идеологий анализируются особенности и проблемы языковой политики советского периода и влияние, которое они оказали на современные языковые установки жителей региона. Кроме того, в статье приводится анализ языкового законодательства Приднестровья, призванного защитить исторически сложившийся языковой плюрализм в республике, но на практике имеющий скорее символическое значение. В результате, опираясь на анализ данных, полученных из 135 онлайн-анкет, стало возможным прийти к выводу, что этническое самосознание респондентов в значительной степени определяет решение о выборе определенных языков в качестве их родного языка (языков), что, однако, не относится к вопросу этнической принадлежности участников. Также стало ясным, что навязывание языковых идеологий на государственном уровне повлияло на языковые установки участников исследования и их убеждения о роли русского языка в республике, особенно в сфере образования, карьеры и поддержания межэтнического мира в регионе.

Ключевые слова: языковая идеология, языковые установки, Приднестровье, русский язык, многоязычие, идентичность.

Научная специальность: 10.02.19 – теория языка

Исследование выполнено в рамках программы «Научный фонд НИУ ВШЭ» в 2020–2021 гг. (грант № 20–04–019) и Российского проекта академического превосходства «5–100». Исследовательская группа «Языковые практики в контексте этнокультурного разнообразия».

Introduction

In September 2020, Pridnestrovie as a young, post-Soviet *de facto* independent state, celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. The country emerged on a political map, though not internationally recognized, a year before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Over these years, most of the republics in the post-Soviet space have gone through substantial political, socio-economic, and cultural transformations, some of which were successful while others were not so. One group of countries has maintained close ties with the Russian Federation whereas others have distanced themselves from the Soviet and, hence, Russian ‘legacy’.

In fact, the relations between Russia and some former Soviet republics where, after having declared their independence, a significant number of Russian-speaking population still remained, had to be developed further in so far as there was a need to protect their rights, including linguistic ones. That is due to the fact that since the 1990s the Russian language has lost the status of a ‘state language’ in practically all the republics of the former Soviet Union, except for Russia and Belarus. As a result, the possibilities for the Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltic countries, for example, to get access to education or to be provided with public services in their first language (Russian) have been limited.

In Estonia and Latvia, this problem is primarily associated with the phenomenon of ‘non-citizens’ of ethnic Russians, which did not spark any conflict, whereas in Moldova and Ukraine the language issue played a major role in igniting hostility that led to military conflicts in these countries, in 1992 and 2014, respectively. Nonetheless, it would be rather premature to talk about the impact of recent events in Ukraine on the language situation in the country and the region. Meanwhile, the case of Pridnestrovie, which chose to be independent of the Republic of Moldova, boasts three offi-

cial languages: Russian, Moldovan (based on the Cyrillic alphabet), and Ukrainian, and as such, it is of special interest to language planners and language researchers.

Pridnestrovie, currently, remains the only country in the post-Soviet space where the rights of people from the three main ethnic groups (Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians) are equally guaranteed under the country’s legislation. At the same time, the Russian language is enjoying the status of the language of international communication, and in fact, it is spoken by the overwhelming majority of the republic’s population. The dominance of the Russian language can be visible in many spheres, especially in that of public communication.

This fact naturally distinguishes Russian from the other two official languages and inevitably creates *privileged attitudes* towards it among the overwhelming majority of residents of the republic. It is worth noting that Pridnestrovie’s independence was, in part, declared pursuing the purpose of protecting and preserving the Russian language as well as linguistic pluralism in the region. Hence the socio-political underpinnings of the language situation in Pridnestrovie make it particularly relevant to look at it through the prism of multilingualism in the post-Soviet space, as well as from the Russian foreign policy standpoint, that is also aimed at spreading and maintaining the Russian language and cultural norms around the world. In the present paper, an attempt is made to demonstrate how dominant language ideologies influence people’s language attitudes towards Russian in the post-Soviet republic of Pridnestrovie. The present paper is organized as follows: in section 1, the theoretical framework is discussed; section 2, provides a detailed socio-historical background of the area under investigation; in section 3, the methodology of the study is outlined; the results are discussed in section 4; the final section briefly summarizes.

1. Theoretical framework

There has been a great number of studies on the political and economic processes that have been taking place in the Republic of Moldova (and in Pridnestrovie as well) since it gained its independence in 1991. Most of these studies have been devoted to the Transnistrian conflict settlement and other aspects of Moldovan foreign policy including geopolitical and human rights issues (Babilunga, 2015; De Waal, 2018; Galushchenko, 2014; Negura, 2016; Putintsev, 2018). However, there has been much less research on the language situation in Moldova (Arefiev, 2012; Arutyunova, 2012; O'Loughlin et al. 2013; Tabak, 1990), and in Pridnestrovie (Comai, Venturi, 2015; Guboglo, 2016; Muth, 2014; Pogorelaya, 2003) specifically, except for the problem of Romanian-language schools on the left bank of the Dniester River (Alexianu, 2015; Osipov, Vasilevich, 2019). Moreover, no study has reported in detail on the attitudes people hold towards the languages present in the territory of both republics.

To address the research gap, the present study seeks to analyse the language situation in Pridnestrovie and to find out how people from different ethnic backgrounds perceive the Russian language. For this purpose, we draw on the concepts of language ideology and language attitudes, to address the issues in question.

The term 'language ideologies' as 'any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' was first offered by Silverstein (1979: 193). Then other linguistic anthropologists, who were also interested in how politics and social action might have an impact on the language issues, gave another emphasis on what a language ideology is. For instance, Irvine (1989: 255) proposed the following definition of language ideology: 'the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests'. As a result, this and further developments of the notion allowed researchers to view the language policy of any country in terms of one or several language ideologies. The present article considers a language ideology as a set of ideas about the

use of particular language(s) in a given political context.

So far, the most common language ideologies implemented in different contexts are monolingualism (e.g. 'English only' policy in the USA (see Wiley and Lukes, 1996), standard language ideology referred to the problem of dialects/varieties of a language (see Lippi-Green, 1997), 'language-as-resource' (often related to the issue of minority languages), multiculturalism/multilingualism (e.g. a type of policy adopted in Canada, Switzerland, the European Union) which have been elaborated in Ricento's (2013) relatively recent study. In his work, he insightfully explains how these approaches to language policy have been applied in the United States and Canada, and what could influence, or even impede, their effective implementation. Ricento (2013) argues that one of the main obstacles to a successful implementation of language policy is people's attitudes to language(s), as they are fundamentally tied to identities, and hence emotions, which could largely affect the success of any measures undertaken in the linguistic field. Therefore, in this paper, multilingualism, as a linguistic ideology described by Ricento (2013), is to be seen as a conceptual framework for the research since its postulates (linguistic pluralism, use of mother tongues as the medium of instruction in schools, development of minority languages, etc.) correspond to the core principles on which the Pridnestrovian statehood is based.

In addition, the notion of 'language attitudes' will be applied in the data analysis as a supplementary concept to explain the peculiarities of the language situation in Pridnestrovie, and why the actual model of inter-ethnic interaction has been operating successfully to some degree, over the last thirty years. Borrowed from psychology, the term 'attitudes' refers to 'a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects' (Sarnoff, 1970: 279) and tends to include three types of components: cognitive (beliefs and stereotypes), affective (evaluations) and behavioural (Garrett, 2007). Similarly, this disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to something can be applied to languages. Normally, attitudes to languages are developed through hu-

man socialization, therefore, the earlier they developed, the less amenable to changes in later life they are (Garrett, 2007). Nevertheless, language attitudes are primarily a mental construct, which immediately casts doubt on the reliability of the data collected for research, since it is rather impossible to verify whether the respondents have such attitudes indeed. That is why, in sociolinguistics, there are three key approaches to study language attitudes, usually termed: the societal treatment approach, the direct approach, and the indirect approach (Garrett, 2007).

This study applies only the first two approaches that seem the most relevant here. The analysis of various sources such as the discourse of government policy, legislative framework, media, cinema, will help investigate the historical background of the region and analyse the current language situation, whereas the direct approach, i.e. surveys and interviews, will be useful for the wording of questions in our online questionnaire.

Thus, based on the theoretical framework provided above the paper aims at addressing the following research questions:

- 1) What language attitudes do people of Pridnestrovie from different ethnic backgrounds and age groups have?
- 2) How do language ideologies influence the ethnic self-identification of people in Pridnestrovie?

2. Language policy and language situation in Pridnestrovie: past and present

2.1. The history of the settlement of the Trans-Dniester lands in the 19th century

The rapid proliferation of the Russian language across the Trans-Dniester lands began after these territories had been ceded by Turkey to the Russian Empire. In the Treaty of Bucharest (1812) the Ottoman Empire ceded Bessarabia to Russia including the fortress of Bender. Thus, a significant number of Russian people and foreigners, mostly Moldovans, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians, Germans, and others, who decided to leave their home countries (which were under Turkish rule), came to

settle in these territories (Main Directorate of the General Staff, 1863a).

Nonetheless, the special role of Russian was not the only distinctive feature of the linguistic situation in the region in that period. Some historical sources clearly show that Moldovans in the Kherson Governorate, in addition to their native language, also spoke Russian and Ukrainian, but only when it was necessary. Similarly, Ukrainians could speak to Moldovans in their first language (Main Directorate of the General Staff 1863b)¹.

As a result, a community that was formed in the lands in question was initially multi-ethnic, without a dominant ethnic group, and the First General Census of the Population of the Russian Empire in 1897 confirmed this fact (Central Statistical Committee, 1904; Central Statistical Committee, 1905). Although, based on the data provided by the census, Russians did not predominate in the Tiraspol district, nor in Bender, it could be argued that most people in the region spoke Russian to some degree. That was primarily because Russian was the language of commerce, the so-called *lingua franca*, used by the provincial authorities and traders to talk to the local residents, and it was becoming the language of instruction at school, which the Census has proved as well.

This state of affairs remained practically without major changes until the October revolution of 1917. The next subsection will, therefore, be devoted to the changes in the language situation in the region during the Soviet period.

2.2. Language situation and language policy in the Pridnestrovian region under the Soviet regime (1918–1990)

When the Bolsheviks rose to power, almost all the territory of modern Pridnestrovie became a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, except for Bender that was annexed together with the whole Bessarabia by the Kingdom of Romania in 1918. Although Bessarabia was transferred back to the Soviet Union in 1940, many decisions taken by the Soviet au-

¹ The most compelling fact is that in some villages where both ethnic groups lived together, people usually agreed on days when the Moldovan and Slavic languages were to be used during a service in the church.

thorities at that time have had a significant impact on the destiny of people who live on both banks of the Dniester River today (Babilunga, 2015: 45–48). It primarily concerns the creation of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (henceforth, MASSR) in 1924.

MASSR was the first *de jure* independent state on the left bank of the Dniester River. It was formed to get Bessarabia back and create a Moldovan state on that territory to spread the revolution movement further to the Balkans and Central Europe, as well as to formally meet the national aspirations of the Moldovans living in the Pridnestrovian region (Galushchenko, 2014: 207). Although serious internal party disputes accompanied the process, a political decision to create a Moldovan republic within Soviet Ukraine was made on October 12, 1924 (Babilunga, 2015: 42)². The ethnic composition of the new republic was the following: Moldovans constituted 45 % of the population, while Ukrainians and Russians accounted for 30 % and 13 % respectively (Tabak, 1990: 65). Hence, for the first time in its history, the left bank of the Dniester River became part of the Moldovan state, therefore, the language situation and the consequent language policy in the region from 1940 to 1991 must be considered within the context of Soviet Moldavia.

An important point worth mentioning in this regard is the migration flow of people from other Soviet republics to Moldavia, which began in the years of the MASSR, when hundreds of specialists, engineers, skilled workers, teachers were sent by the Soviet Government to the republic to foster the development of the national economy. However, since the 1960s the organized migration had ceased and people used to come to Moldavia individually. As a result, over the next 30 years, the residents of other Soviet republics (mainly from Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan) moved to Moldavia, and most of them were ethnic Russians. The key reason for migration to the region, in addition to a better climate, was considered the ethnic and cultural proximity of nationalities living in the MSSR, which evidently fostered the adaptation of the newcomers to local conditions (Tabak, 1990: 85). Though it had never

been a problem, as most of them settled in cities, and villages where Russians traditionally made up a significant proportion of the population. In general, as a result of migration from 1959 to 1979, the total number of ethnic Russians in Moldavia increased from 292 930 to 505 730 people, although the peak was reached in 1989 when Russians constituted 562,069 residents or 13 % of the total population of the republic (State Committee of the USSR on statistics, 1990).

Naturally, the increase in the Russian population was accompanied by the further proliferation of the Russian language, especially in the multi-ethnic urban environment. As the language for international communication throughout the Soviet Union and a compulsory subject in all Soviet schools, Russian became indispensable in education, culture, official documentation as well as in large industrial enterprises, where close inter-ethnic contacts were inevitable. Consequently, by 1979, about 60 % of the total non-Russian population of the MSSR was fluent in Russian, along with their first language, whereas Moldovan as the language of the host ethnic group did not enjoy the same popularity (Tabak, 1990: 104–105). Therefore, since the late 1980s, it is important to consider not only ethnic Russians in Moldova but also Russian speakers, who at the same time could be people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Although the interethnic interaction in Soviet Moldavia had been mainly perceived in a positive way, the situation in the field of national and linguistic policy became rather strained since Gorbachev's 'perestroika' had begun in the late 1980s. That culminated in nationalist movements in 1989 which led to the MSSR autonomy demands, the adoption of Latin script for the Moldovan language and its recognition as identical to Romanian, as well as to the 'historical reunification' of Moldova with Romania. Consequently, it resulted in the emergence of laws 'On the return of Latin script to the Moldovan language' and 'On the functioning of languages on the territory of the Moldavian SSR' adopted by the MSSR Supreme Council on August 31, and on September 1, 1989, respectively. According to the

² Tiraspol became its capital in 1929.

latter, the Moldovan language based on the Latin script has become the state language of the MSSR. Meanwhile, Russian, along with Moldovan, was given the status of the language of interethnic communication, 'which ensures the implementation of actual national-Russian and Russian-national bilingualism' (The Republic of Moldova, 1989a).

Logically, the adoption of these laws caused a negative reaction from the Russian-speaking population, which, in turn, provoked conflicts in Gagauzia and Pridnestrovie. In the case of the latter, attempts to reach a compromise between Tiraspol and Chisinau by peaceful means of the federalization of the republic failed. Since then, and especially after the clashes in Bender, the Republic of Moldova and Pridnestrovie have existed *de facto* independently for over the last 30 years, and the conflicts settlement process has not led to a political solution yet.

2.3. Language situation and language policy in Pridnestrovie (1990 – present)

The Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) was officially created on September 2, 1990. It included the left bank of the Dniester River and the town of Bender situated on the right bank. Though it is called a self-proclaimed republic, over the 30 years Pridnestrovie has been an independently governed state that has its own language legislation as well. In this section key documents in the field of language policy will be presented, and after that, the features of the current language situation in Pridnestrovie will be explained.

One of the fundamental principles on which the Pridnestrovian statehood is built is the equality of the languages of three main nationalities who live in the country. That was first proclaimed in the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the PMSSR³ (1990). Later, it was reaffirmed in the law 'On Languages in the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic' (1992), which laid the foundations of the language policy of Pridnestrovie.

³ Before the collapse of the Soviet Union Pridnestrovie was officially called Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In contrast to the equivalent law of the Republic of Moldova, Article 3 of this document gives the status of an official language on an equal basis to the Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian languages, which in fact reflects the ethnic composition of MSSR's regions on the left bank of the Dniester River in 1989: Moldovans accounted for 39.9 %, Ukrainians – 28.3 %, Russians – 25.4 %, other nationalities – 6.4 % (Pogorelaya, 2003: 228). In addition, Article 5 also recognizes the three languages as means of interethnic communication throughout the territory of the republic. An important point here is a provision contained in Article 6, which establishes 'the original Cyrillic alphabet' for the Moldovan language and prohibits its use in the Latin script. In general, the law guarantees the right to use any of the languages of the PMR or the Commonwealth of Independent States in Pridnestrovie, if necessary. In 1995, the equal official status of the three languages was secured by Article 12 of the Constitution of the PMR.

The next important pieces of legislation on linguistic rights are the laws on public service and on education. For instance, Article 18 of the law 'On civil service in the PMR' provides that any citizen of Pridnestrovie who speaks at least one official language can apply for a public sector job. Thus, all Pridnestrovian citizens are legally entitled to participate in government, regardless of their ethnicity and the language they speak.

As for the opportunities for children to get an education in the mother tongue, the law 'On languages in the PMR' provides education in Moldovan and (or) Russian, and (or) Ukrainian languages, thus establishing the language pluralism, historically formed in the territory of the republic, in the education system too. Moreover, in addition to the language of instruction students learn one of the other official languages of the republic in all Pridnestrovian educational institutions.

According to the State Statistics Service of the PMR, the ethnic composition of the republic's population (465 thousand people in 2019) is the following: Moldovans make up 33 %, Russians and Ukrainians account for 34.2 % and 26.7 % respectively, Bulgarians

constitute 2.7 %, and 3.4 % of people belong to other nationalities (State Statistics Service of the PMR 2020). Therefore, the official status for the Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian languages is still relevant and corresponds to the existing ethnolinguistic reality. Though, it should be noted that in practice the Russian language, which 96.3 % of the population speaks fluently, dominates in almost all spheres such as public communication, education, media, science, culture (Pogorelaya, 2003: 330). Moldovan and Ukrainian, on the contrary, are mainly used for interpersonal communication, for everyday activities and rather occasionally at the state level, for example, during some TV programs, at official ceremonies devoted to national holidays, in educational institutions which have them as languages of instruction, in the administration of some villages of the republic, where Moldovans and Ukrainians predominate.

This point could be perfectly illustrated by the data on the distribution of state schools of Pridnestrovie and their students by the language of instruction.

As can be seen in Table 1, the Russian language significantly prevails in the school edu-

cation system of Pridnestrovie, and the number of students instructed in Russian has been gradually increasing in recent years. Moreover, it has been obvious that the distribution of students by the language of instruction does not correspond to the above-mentioned ethnic composition of the republic's population. This may be caused by the language shift in favour of Russian among the younger generation, which further strengthens the position of Russian and could threaten linguistic pluralism in the country. The preservation of the latter, in fact, strongly depends on the readiness of young people to do it. In this regard, the question arises as to whether the youth, who mostly speaks Russian, will continue to use their native languages, and will transmit them to their children in the future or not. However, there are some obstacles in this way.

The first one concerns the Moldovan language. Pridnestrovie is the only place in the world where this language is used in the Cyrillic script. On the one hand, it claims to defend the original identity of the Moldovan people, based on traditions, culture and the centuries-old Cyrillic script of the Moldovan language, in the ideological confrontation with the Republic

Table 1. Distribution of schools and students by the language of instruction in Pridnestrovie

	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Number of state schools,	154	150	150	151	151
by language of instruction:					
Russian	110	108	110	112	114
Moldovan	28	26	26	25	25
Russian and Moldovan	11	12	11	11	9
Ukrainian	3	3	3	3	3
Russian and Ukrainian	2	1	-	-	-
Number of students there,	43864	43426	43374	43919	44006
by language of instruction:					
Russian	36600	35659	36983	37795	38240
Moldovan	3776	3380	3229	3137	2974
Russian and Moldovan	2208	3208	2670	2531	2376
Ukrainian	590	518	492	456	416
Russian and Ukrainian	690	661	-	-	-

Source: State Statistics Service of the PMR. 2020. Statistical Yearbook of Pridnestrovie – 2019.

of Moldova which established the Moldovan language in the Latin script as the state language in its Constitution, recognized earlier as Romanian in the Declaration of Independence. On the other hand, the Moldovan language that is preserved in Pridnestrovie can be called, to a certain extent, obsolete, as practically nothing has been produced in it since 1989. As a result, only ethnic Moldovans keep it alive by communicating in it every day while the language itself is not being developed in terms of its real use in other domains. That is why in most cases there is no incentive for other people to know it proficiently. Although the authorities of Pridnestrovie have acknowledged the problem and have repeatedly launched programs to improve the Moldovan language teaching, so far it has not produced the desired results.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that over the 30 years of independence Pridnestrovie has never faced an internal conflict based on ethnic or language grounds despite the fact that Russian obviously predominates over Moldovan and Ukrainian in almost all domains, except for interpersonal communication. According to Pogorelaya (2003: 366), this is due to the stable model of interethnic communication that has historically evolved in this region for two hundred years, and because of the advanced language legislation which is indispensable in the multi-ethnic countries such as Pridnestrovie. The Russian language, in her opinion, is an essential part of the existing system of language interaction and is the basis that unites all nationalities living in the republic, forming a special community of Russian-speakers and turning it into civil society, the main value of which is the preservation of cultural orientations and language preferences of the individual. Guboglo (2016: 16) argues, along these lines, that bilingualism and multilingualism is the basis for the lasting peace in Pridnestrovie. Despite the predominance of Russian in almost all aspects of the life of the Pridnestrovian society, he maintains that the most important fact is that the Constitution of the PMR provides opportunities to preserve the Moldovan and Ukrainian languages, which 'signals the

loyalty to the region and the commitment to more than two centuries of tradition of living together'.

At the same time, European researchers Osipov and Vasilevich (2019: 983–989), who study the 'politics of diversity' in Pridnestrovie, also note that the interethnic peace in the country is largely encouraged by the facts (and sometimes myths) from the history of the region and by the values mainly inherited from the Soviet era which most of the people in the country share. These are the negative attitude towards Romania, which committed atrocities in these territories during the Great Patriotic War; the Soviet tradition of internationalism, and the common cultural code associated primarily with the Russian language and its culture. Today's concept about Pridnestrovie as a part of the so-called Russian World and a national ideology of being the only state in the world that preserves the original Moldovan identity and language could be added to the list as well. However, they believe that the only stain on the international reputation of Pridnestrovie nowadays is the problem of the Romanian language schools on the left bank of the Dniester River which received considerable publicity in Europe, though it has been finally resolved in recent years.

3. Methodology

3.1. *Questionnaire design*

The questionnaire consists of 17 questions and includes closed-ended, semi-closed and open-ended question types. The first four questions relate to the demographic information of the respondents, such as gender, age group, level of education, profession/occupation.

The next four questions elicit answers on the respondents' ethnicity, what language(s) they consider to be their mother tongue (first language) and what Russian means to them, whether they speak any other languages presented in Pridnestrovie, and for how long they have lived in the republic. Overall, this block of questions is targeted at eliciting participants' personalities from an ethnolinguistic point of view, which would allow conclusions to be drawn from the answers provided to subsequent questions.

The second part looks at the linguistic behaviour of the participants, i.e. what language(s) they use in different domains, and what they think of some aspect of the language policy in Pridnestrovie.

It is also worth mentioning that most of the questions are of a semi-closed type. Participants, therefore, can either choose one of the proposed options or enter their own variant. This is justified by the complexity and ambiguity of the ethnolinguistic issues that make it difficult to predict all possible options. Some questions, however, are open-ended and require that people express their own opinion, while others are of a closed type since accurate quantitative information about the respondents and their opinion is needed for the statistical analysis.

3.2. Participants

The survey was conducted in January and February 2020. The questionnaire was disseminated online: respondents filled out a questionnaire using a Google form. The total number of participants is 135, most of them being residents of Bender and Tiraspol.

The key criterion for selecting the respondents was their ethnic belonging, as it has been initially suggested to divide them into two groups. The first includes residents of Pridnestrovie who consider themselves as ethnic Russians, while the second one involves people from other nationalities. This approach has been applied to identify whether there is any significant difference in the attitudes of people from different ethnic backgrounds in Pridnestrovie towards the Russian language.

The participants were also divided into three age groups: a) 25–35 years old (30 participants), b) 36–54 years old (62 people), c) 55 and older (43 respondents). It should be pointed out that most of the participants aged 55 and older, were born and raised in the Soviet Union, were overtly exposed to Soviet ideology and used to live in a multicultural society under the Soviet's 'friendship of nations' ideology, where, however, the Russian language dominated in practically all spheres. Many participants who belong to the 36–54 age group witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the adoption of

the new language policy of the Moldovan authorities and the creation of a new state, Pridnestrovie. Meanwhile, most of the younger participants (25–35 years old) grew up in a new reality of the Pridnestrovian statehood, in the context of cultural and linguistic pluralism.

However, it turned out to be formidable to achieve full compliance of the sample with these two criteria. Therefore, 100 women and only 35 men took part in a survey. A possible explanation for this could be the greater interest of women in participating in the survey and a stereotypical reluctance of men, although few refusals were received from people of both genders. In addition, although all the questionnaires were anonymous, some would-be participants were unwilling to express their opinion because of sensitivity of language issues in Pridnestrovie.

4. Results and Discussion

The question 'what is your mother tongue?' has always been important in understanding sociolinguistic processes, especially when dealing with factors affecting language maintenance/shift, identity affiliations and people's attitudes. Therefore, answers to the question regarding participants' chosen mother tongue(s) in a multiethnic region of Pridnestrovie, (answers ...) are of paramount importance.

As the data show in Fig. 1, for the overwhelming majority of the participants, Russian is their native language (72 %), followed by two other official languages of the republic, Moldovan and Ukrainian (10 % and 8 %, respectively). The Bulgarian language occupies an equal position with Moldovan and Ukrainian, which is not common throughout the republic (see State Statistics Service of the PMR, 2020), but only in the southern part of Pridnestrovie, where the survey was conducted. The only Bulgarian village, called Parcani, has a larger population than some towns in the region have and is located between Bender and Tiraspol. The last fact explains why the Bulgarian language might be heard or function as a mother tongue in these towns. Gagauz is a mother tongue to people from a small Turkic-speaking ethnic group living in the south of Moldova. The presence of other languages as mother tongues is

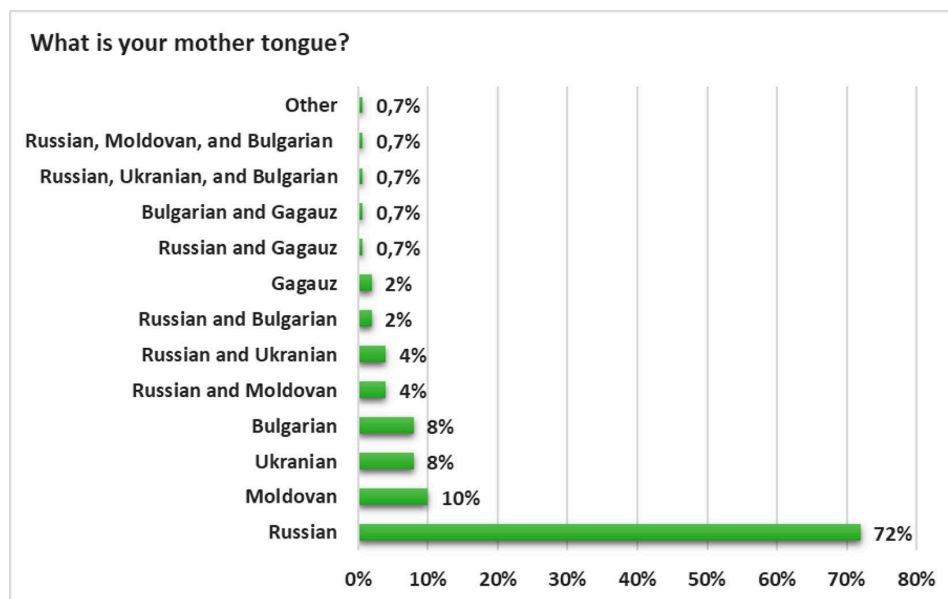


Fig. 1. Respondents' self-reported mother tongue(s)

due to the migration processes of the Soviet era when residents from other Soviet republics moved to Moldova.

Interestingly, the selection of particular mother tongue(s) proportionately does not coincide with the participants' selection of their ethnicity. As the data in Figure 2 demonstrate, only 44 % of the participants reported being Russian (as opposed to 73 % of those who chose Russian as a mother tongue). 16 % of the participants reported being Moldovan (as opposed to 10 % of those who chose Moldovan as a mother tongue) while 21 % reported being Ukrainian (as opposed to only 8 % of those who chose Ukrainian as a mother tongue). This suggests that the Russian language still occupies a strong position for many participants, being a powerful cultural component of Soviet legacy, even for those who reported not being Russian. At the same time, if we compare the data presented in Fig. 1 and 2, it becomes evident that for 16 % of Moldovans and 21 % of Ukrainians the question of their ethnicity is of high importance to them, especially for those who did not select their respective language as a mother tongue.

The question 'What does Russian mean to you?', was designed for those whose native

language was different from Russian: 19,25 % of the participants marked it as the '*second mother tongue*'; 14,8 % of the respondents named it the '*mother tongue of one of the parents*'; 5,9 % of the participants considered it as the '*language of the spouse*'; and, finally, 16,3 % reported that it is a '*mother tongue of the children*'. In total, this exceeds the number of those who chose a language different from Russian as their mother tongue. This can be explained by the fact that many people selected several options or added their own ones, for example, '*the mother tongue of the family*'. Thus, it leads to the conclusion that Russian functions as the first (native) or second language for almost all the residents of Pridnestrovie.

Data in Fig. 1 also show that the number of those who provided answers to the question 'What does Russian mean to you?' is greater than the number of participants. This is because some respondents chose several native languages at once. Consequently, these data confirm assumptions about bilingualism, and sometimes trilingualism of some residents of Pridnestrovie, developed in this region as a result of the republic's history and various socio-political events (see section 2).

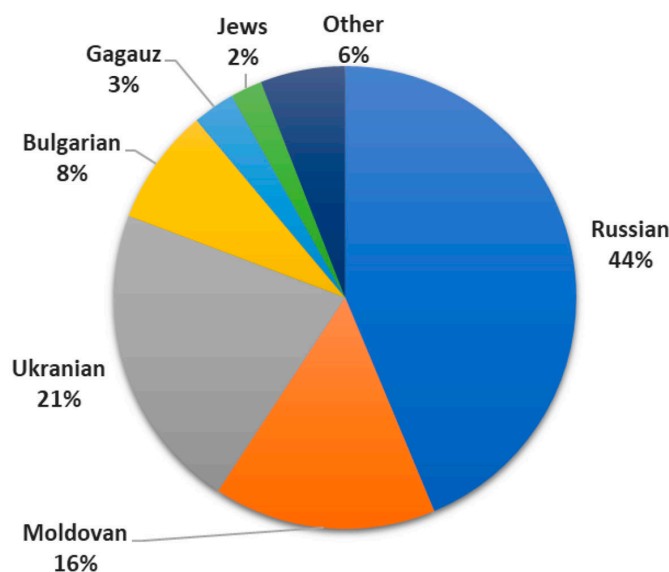


Fig. 2. Self-reported ethnicity of the respondents

More light is shed on the phenomenon of bilingualism by looking at the participants' answers to the question 'Do you speak any other languages of Pridnestrovie, except for Russian and your mother tongue?'. Slightly more than half of the participants (54.1 %) provided a positive reply to this question. The distribution by language and the degree of proficiency is presented in Fig. 3.

Data presented in Fig. 3 demonstrate that almost 32 % of the respondents, reported knowing (*speaking, reading, writing: proficiency in each skill varies*) the Moldovan language, 35 % – Ukrainian, 9,6 % – Bulgarian. At the same time, 13,3 % of people reported being proficient in both Moldovan and Ukrainian languages, to a certain extent. An interesting fact is that if Bulgarian is mainly spoken by those who belong to the Bulgarian ethnic group or who could be argued to be a member of the family where this language is spoken at home, the knowledge of Moldovan and Ukrainian is not necessarily associated with the ethnicity of the participants. According to the answers given, the most frequent situations, in which the languages are used, refer to communication with relatives or with native speakers (including work) (37 %), watching TV programs (10 %), reading newspapers and magazines

(9 %), browsing the Internet (9 %), etc. That is, in Pridnestrovie, these languages continue to exist mainly in interpersonal communication between people who possess them in their linguistic repertoire (i.e. mostly with relatives and friends, or in some job-related situations). The last point could imply the presence of contacts with partners from Moldova and Ukraine, the countries between which Pridnestrovie is geographically situated.

Nonetheless, the question of how the respondents have mastered the above-mentioned second languages still remains unanswered. A potential explanation can be given by looking at the data elicited from questions referring to a respondent's country of origin and the medium of instruction he/she was exposed to at school. The results are presented in Fig. 4.

As it is evident from Fig. 4, almost 61 % of the participants reported that they were born in Pridnestrovie (until 1990, the Moldavian SSR), therefore, at least at school, they all learned the Moldovan language, and since 1990 they have been able to choose Ukrainian. Meanwhile, 39 % of the respondents moved to this region; 11,8 % were from Ukraine (plus 1,4 % from Kazakhstan, but they were born in Ukraine); 12,6 % from Russia; 0,07 % from Uzbekistan and Lithuania; and 11,8 % from dif-

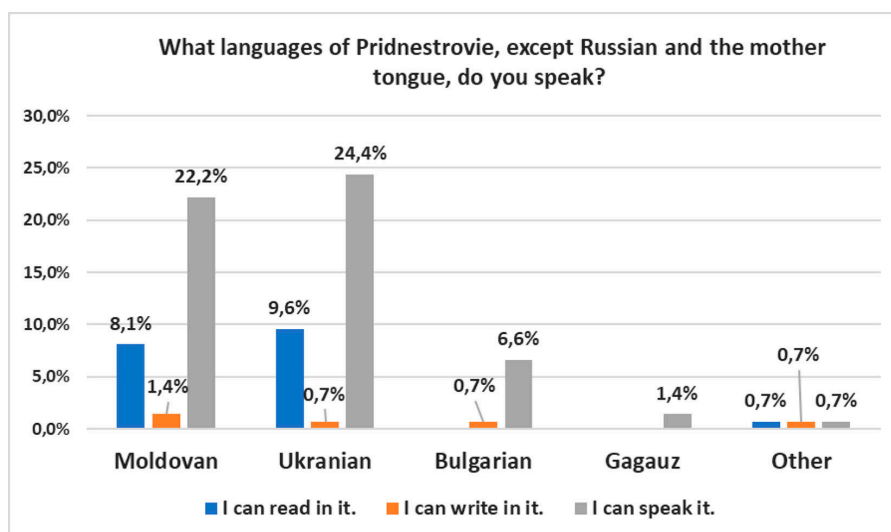


Fig. 3. The distribution by language and the degree of self-reported proficiency

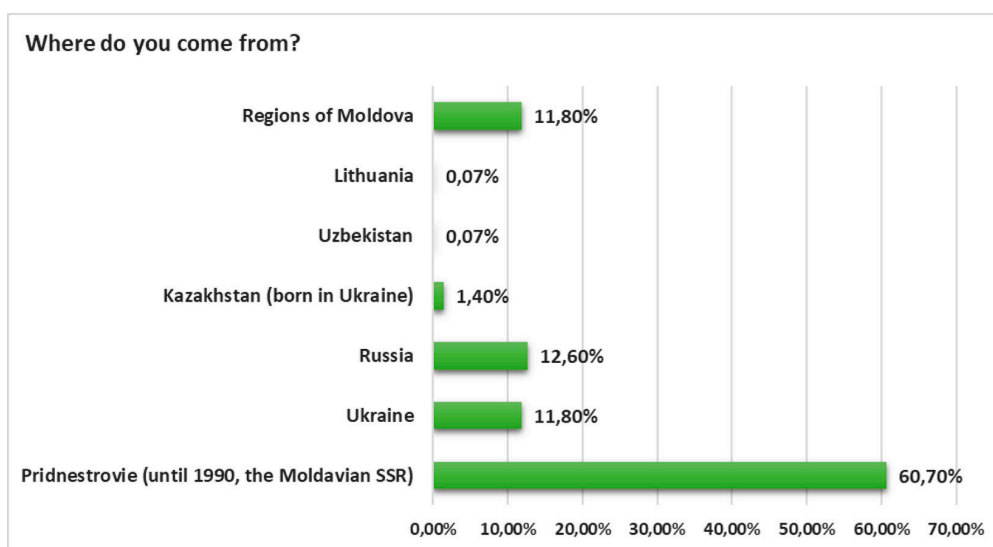


Fig. 4. The distribution by country of origin

ferent regions of Moldova. As for the language of instruction, the overwhelming majority of respondents (87,4 %) reported it to be Russian, and only 12,5 % of the participants indicated that they had Ukrainian as the language of instruction at school (2,9 %), Moldovan (4,4 %), or Russian and Moldovan/Ukrainian (4,4 %), or all three languages (0,07 %).

Consequently, it can be concluded that the proficiency of the participants in Pridnestro-

vie in one of the languages of the republic is not necessarily related to their place of birth, and to what language of instruction was at school. This can be accounted for by the fact that around 26 % of the participants, who were born in Pridnestrovie (the Moldavian SSR), reported that they did not speak any other language, other than Russian. This, in fact, might have been caused by the language shift in favour of the Russian language, which began in

the late Soviet era and is still taking place in Pridnestrovie, being one of the consequences of the republic's language policy.

Answers provided to the next questions are of particular interest for this study as they concern some debatable language aspects of the education system in Pridnestrovie. The first one concerns whether Russian should be the only language of instruction for all students, regardless of which language is their mother tongue, whereas the second one is about the compulsory study of the second official language (Moldovan or Ukrainian) in all schools of Pridnestrovie.

For instance, practically 38 % of the participants confidently stated that children in Pridnestrovie should be taught exclusively in the Russian language, since, as many participants argued, Russian is the main language in the republic and a language for international communication. The knowledge of Russian, according to these participants, would allow their children to study (in higher education) in Russia, and generally, it offers better career prospects. It is important to stress these participants' awareness of the economic benefits of the Russian language and how they would like their children to capitalize on their knowledge of it. It should be pointed out that several respondents (5,6 %) explained further their position in terms of personal preferences, for example, one informant said 'I just like Russian'. At the same time, 62 % of the respondents are in favour of offering their children the right to choose the medium of instruction at school and stand for providing such opportunities in the republic, often citing the Constitution of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, which guarantees education in any of the republic's official languages. Nonetheless, many of the participants (almost 40 %) noted that the Russian language should remain a compulsory subject for everyone, even if it is not the language of instruction.

As for the obligatory teaching of the second official language in Pridnestrovian schools, most of the respondents (84,4 %) appear to be in favour of this practice. Around 34 % of the participants supported the idea that since the republic is multi-ethnic, there-

fore, the study of official languages (Moldovan and Ukrainian) is necessary for communication and a better understanding of their speakers, who constitute the national majority in neighbouring states, Moldova and Ukraine. In addition, some respondents (slightly less than 20 %) noted the importance of studying these languages for self-development, as well as for the preservation of the cultural heritage of all nationalities living in Pridnestrovie. Among those who hold the opposite opinion, there were 6,6 % of the participants who argued that the second official language(s) teaching should be optional, while 8,8 % of the respondents marked these languages as an unnecessary component of the school curriculum, pointing out that these languages are not needed and are difficult to master. It is worth emphasizing that a few supporters (3 %) of both positions mentioned the problem of the Moldovan language in the Cyrillic script, urging either to introduce the Latin alphabet, or to make its study optional, and stressed the importance of the English language, which, in their opinion, is necessary for everyone in the modern world: *'It seems to me that it is better to be fluent in English, which is required nowadays, than to try to learn Moldovan, which is practically not heard anywhere in our region'*.

Still, despite the fact that there could be some disagreements in the Pridnestrovian society on language issues (e.g. on the relevance of Moldovan in the Cyrillic script), the Russian language predominates over other official ones in almost all aspects of social, cultural and political life in Pridnestrovie, which, in theory, could generate discontent among speakers of other languages, over the 30 years of the republic's existence there have been no open conflicts on these grounds. And, as it was already mentioned, the basis of the interethnic peace in Pridnestrovie is precisely the Russian language, often functioning as a lingua franca, and the common cultural and historical heritage associated with it. This is confirmed by the answers to questions about the respondents' attitudes towards the Russian language in Pridnestrovie and their ethnic identity perceptions.

Thus, the results based on the answers given to the question 'In your opinion, what

is the main role of Russian in Pridnestrovie?', were grouped and summarized as is shown in Fig. 5.

Furthermore, the analysis of the answers to the question 'What is your ethnic identity?' (see Fig. 6, below) leads to the conclusion that the Russian language, in addition to all its functions, is also the language that has an impact on how participants ethnically self-identify, regardless of their ethnicity and mother tongue choices, as is seen in Figures 1 and 2 above.

As the data in Figure 6 demonstrate, the vast majority (almost 80 %) of respondents identified themselves as Russians, 6 % of participants reported to have Moldovan ethnic identity, 3 % Bulgarian, and only 1.5 % Ukrainian. Interestingly, the rest chose other 'combined' options, the most frequent among which was the cosmopolitan identity (3 %) or Russian plus Moldovan and/or Ukrainian and/or Bulgarian and/or Gagauz. Several respondents indicated Soviet identity or rejected the

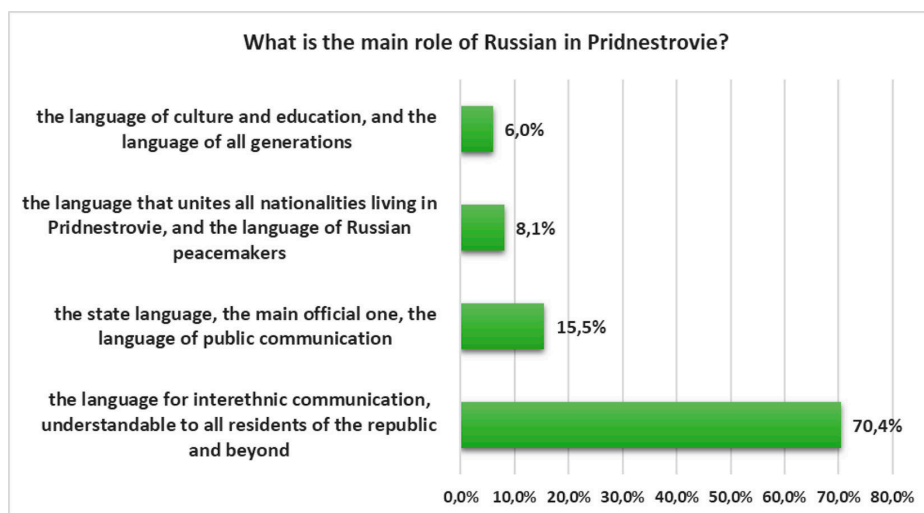


Fig. 5. Attitudes to the Russian language in Pridnestrovie.

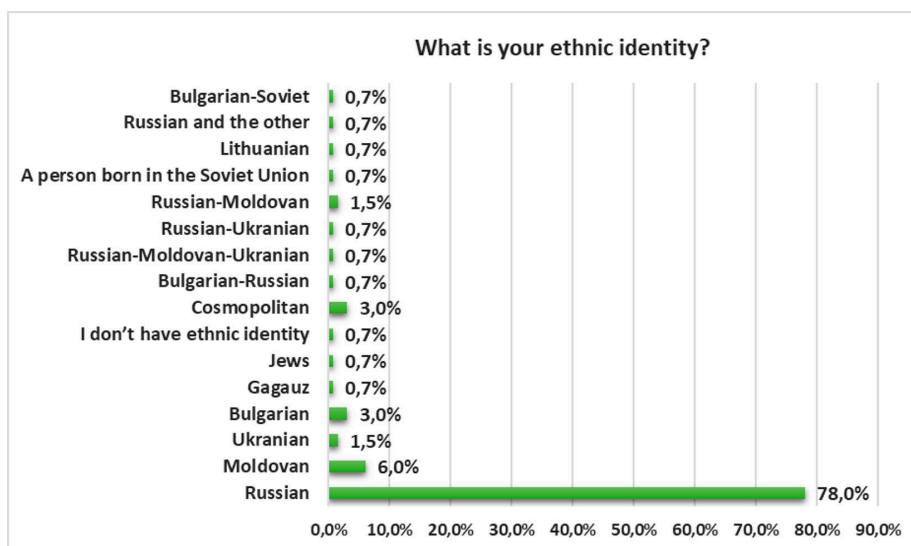


Fig. 6. Self-reported ethnic identity

existence of 'ethnic identity' altogether. Interestingly, the data in Figure 6, when it comes to ethnic self-identification as Russian, can be argued to be linked to those presented in Figure 1 in relation to Russian selected as mother tongue. This suggests that participants' association with Russian as a mother tongue (73 %) can be argued to be correlated with their ethnic self-perception as Russians (78 %), though, there is no visible correlation with their reported ethnicity as Russians (44 %) as it is shown in Figure 2. At the same time, this appears to be working only in relation to Russian, in so far as ethnic identity results for Moldovan and Ukrainian (6 % and 1 %, respectively, Figure 6) cannot boast such correlation with Moldovan and Ukrainian selected as a mother tongue (9 % and 8 %, respectively, Fig. 1).

Overall, the obtained results have shown that the Russian language is indeed an integral part of the everyday life of most of the participants living in Pridnestrovie, regardless of their ethnic background or mother tongue choices. Besides, positive attitudes towards the Russian language determine, to a large extent, how the participants perceive themselves and, consequently, what they associate their past, present and future with.

Conclusion

There have been a number of significant socio-economic and political changes in the life of people who live in the territory of former Soviet Moldavia. Previously, this country was called 'a flourishing garden' of the Soviet Union, but now the situation is not as optimistic, at least when it comes to economic development. Apart from major economic problems and political instability, Moldova still faces di-

vision caused by the language question which emerged at the beginning of its independence in the early 1990s. Since the solution has not been found yet, the ex-Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic is now represented by two independent states: the Republic of Moldova and the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. Compared to the former, Pridnestrovie is the only state in the region where linguistic pluralism is officially proclaimed at the state level and where the high official status of the Russian language is secured.

One of the most challenging obstacles to linguistic pluralism in Pridnestrovie is the language shift in favour of the Russian language that has begun in the Soviet era and has been accelerating since then (see section 2). It could be assumed that this could pose a threat to the republic's multilingualism and multiculturalism as Russian predominates over the other official languages, a fact that might offend native speakers of these languages. Though, as it was argued, this is not the case. The high popularity of the Russian language can be attributed to the fact that people in Pridnestrovie capitalize on the knowledge of Russian (as their first or second language), regardless of their ethnicity and mother tongue, and hold predominantly positive attitudes towards it associating their lives and the lives of their children with this language. Thus, it can be argued that despite the fact that the three official languages in Pridnestrovie are legally and equally represented in the republic, it is the Russian language that enjoys prestige and has taken the role of a language used for the inter-ethnic communication, functioning, thus, as a lingua franca for the multi-ethnic nation of Pridnestrovie.

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Appendix

Questionnaire (translated from Russian to English)

Russian is one of the three official languages of Pridnestrovie, which is spoken by people from different ethnic backgrounds who live in the republic. However, it is little known about what attitudes people have towards the Russian language, and what they generally think about the linguistic situation in the country. Precisely these questions our research aims to address. We would like you to take part in it by filling in the anonymous questionnaire.

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Your gender.

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

2. Your age.

- ☐ 25–35
- ☐ 36–54
- ☐ 55 and older

3. Your level of education.

- ☐ secondary education (school)
- ☐ vocational education (technical college)
- ☐ higher education (university)

4. Your profession / occupation.

5. What is your nationality?

- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Moldovan
- ☐ Ukrainian
- ☐ Bulgarian
- ☐ Gagauz
- ☐ Other: _____ (write down your variant)

6. What is your mother tongue (first language)? (Several options are possible)

- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Moldovan
- ☐ Ukrainian
- ☐ Bulgarian
- ☐ Gagauz
- ☐ Other: _____ (write down your variant)

6.1. What does Russian mean to you? (If it is not your mother tongue) (Several options are possible)

- ☐ second language
- ☐ language of one of your parents
- ☐ language of your spouse

- ☐ language of your children
☐ other _____

7. Do you speak any other languages of Pridnestrovie, except for Russian and your mother tongue? Yes / No

If you have chosen 'yes', please, mark these languages:

Language	I can read in it.	I can write in it.	I can speak it.
<input type="checkbox"/> Moldovan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ukrainian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Bulgarian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Gagauz	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (write down your variant):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7.1. In what situations do you use these languages?

8. How long have you lived in Pridnestrovie?(until 1990, the Moldavian SSR)?

- ☐ I was born here.
☐ I (my family) moved here in _____ (year) from _____ (country, city).

8.1. Why did you move to Pridnestrovie? (until 1990, the Moldavian SSR)?

- ☐ My relatives were born/ lived here.
☐ My spouse was born here.
☐ For another reason: _____
 _____ (write down your variant)

9. What language do you speak at home?

- ☐ only Russian
☐ only mother tongue
☐ mainly mother tongue, sometimes Russian
☐ Russian and mother tongue equally
☐ Mainly Russian, sometimes mother tongue

10. What language do you use when you come to a public institution (e.g., at hospital or at other public places)?

- ☐ only Russian
☐ only mother tongue
☐ mainly mother tongue, sometimes Russian
☐ Russian and mother tongue equally
☐ Mainly Russian, sometimes mother tongue

11. What language did you get an education in?

- ☐ Russian
☐ mother tongue

- ☐ Russian and mother tongue
- ☐ Other: _____ (write down your variant)

12. What language(s) do you speak to your children (grandchildren)?

- ☐ only Russian
- ☐ only mother tongue
- ☐ mainly mother tongue, sometimes Russian
- ☐ Russian and mother tongue equally
- ☐ Mainly Russian, sometimes mother tongue

13. What language do your children (grandchildren) will get an education in?

- ☐ Russian
- ☐ mother tongue
- ☐ Russian and mother tongue
- ☐ Other: _____ (write down your variant)

14. In your opinion, should Russian be the only language of instruction for all students, regardless of which language is their mother tongue?

15. In your opinion, should the second official language (Moldovan or Ukrainian) be a compulsory school subject in all schools of Pridnestrovie?

16. In your opinion, what is the main role of the Russian language in Pridnestrovie?

17. What is your ethnic identity? (Several options are possible)

- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Moldovan
- ☐ Ukrainian
- ☐ Bulgarian
- ☐ Gagauz
- ☐ Other: _____ (write down your variant)