

Radiography of national identity: implications for communication.

Case study: Russian-speaking students

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Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between cultural self-identity and the possibility of effective intercultural communication among Russian-speaking students at the Faculty of Arts of “I. Creangă UPSC”. The study argues that a solid understanding of one's own cultural identity, including respect for oneself and others, is fundamental for tolerance and successful intercultural dialogue.

A survey based on anonymous questionnaires was administered to students, targeting attachment to the Republic of Moldova, self-identification, and perceptions of the protection of national minorities. Preliminary results indicate a strong link between a sense of civic and ethnic belonging to Moldova and openness to Moldovan culture, which, in turn, seems to cultivate respect for other identities.

Students from mixed families were more likely to feel a sense of belonging to Moldovan culture.

However, perceptions of the protection of the rights of national minorities in the Republic of Moldova are contradictory, with some students believing that the European Union offers superior protection. This suggests a need for more; however, perceptions of the safety of the rights of national minorities in the Republic of Moldova are contradictory, with some students believing that the European Union offers superior protection. This suggests a need for more effective promotion of European values of cultural diversity and minority rights.

Keywords: cultural identity, intercultural communication, respect, tolerance

Introduction

The national and implicit cultural identity is an opportunity to communicate and to learn about another way of thinking and perceiving reality. In this vein, the problem of national and implicit cultural identity requires a detailed study and approach. Thus, some point to the futility of tackling it, while others argue that the state is obliged to imprint on society a single identity capable of ensuring the unity of the people and civilizational progress.

What are identities? Here are just a few definitions: National identity is a person's capacity to identify with meaningful objects: with a nation (national identity), with an ethnic group (ethnic identity), cultural values and traditions (cultural identity), social group (social identity), religion (confessional identity), etc. At the same time, it is a cultural

background (ideas, myths, works, institutions, symbols, behaviours, norms, lifestyles) to which individuals feel attached and through which they consider themselves to be different. The psychological view holds that social identity is part of a person's identity or 'self-concept', one of the elements of personality structure. Thus, the concept is incorporated into the system of general psychological theoretical knowledge (Erikson, E. *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968); Zavalloni, M. (1973). Social identity: ethnic group (ethnic identity), with cultural values and traditions (cultural identity), with a social group (social identity), with religion (confessional identity), etc. From a sociological perspective, identity is understood as the result of a person or group of people identifying with a social community (Berger and Luckmann; Tajfel, H., Tajfel, H., *Social identity and intergroup relations*. Cambridge and Paris, 1982, etc.). Among the types of social identity are inevitably represented those groups, whose belonging is of particular value to society, such as sexual (gender), ethnic, and professional identity. Ethnic identity is also emphasised and remains significant. We have reported on these theoretical conceptions in order to emphasize the complexity of studying the subject of identity. Among the types of social identity are inevitably represented those groups, social, whose belonging is of particular value to society - sexual (gender), ethnic, and professional identity. Ethnic identity is also emphasised and remains significant. We have reported on these theoretical conceptions in order to emphasize the complexity of studying the subject of identity.

The sensitivity of national identity is marked in the Republic. The sensitivity of national identity is marked in the Republic of Moldova by its historical context; thus, the Romanian national identity in Moldova was subjected to forced Russification during the Soviet period. The authorities at that time tried to deconstruct the Romanian identity and replace it with a Moldovanist identity, supported by Russification through deportations, censorship and cultural propaganda. During the Soviet period, the Russian language became dominant in administration, education and public life. This led to the formation of a Russophone identity, which includes not only ethnic Russians but also other ethnic groups for whom Russian is an important language of communication. In the context of the affirmation of the Romanian/Moldovan identity after the collapse of the USSR, a reactive linguistic nationalism emerged among Russian speakers, including ethnic Russians.

The political views of Russians in Moldova are diverse, but a significant part is oriented towards maintaining ties with Russia and towards some form of Eurasian integration, in contrast to the pro-European orientation of other segments of the population. After the independence of the Republic of Moldova, efforts were made to consolidate civic and national identity, but tensions among ethnic groups (Romanians, Moldovans, and Russians) remained a controversial topic. The younger generation must, under these conditions, develop its intercultural competence to ensure peaceful coexistence among its distinct groups. As Moldova progresses towards European integration, the identity of Russians and Russian speakers becomes an important factor in discussions about the country's future and how different identities can coexist and contribute to an inclusive society. Thus, the identity of young Russian speakers offers an opportunity for study to foster genuine intercultural dialogue.

In 2009, a study was conducted regarding intercultural dialogue. The study's target group consisted of young people aged 14-30 from the Republic of Moldova. The study's results indicate that 67.1% of young people feel best described as citizens of the Republic of Moldova, 8.1% as residents of specific localities, 2.1% as Europeans, 1.0% as residents of the CIS, and 21.7% by their ethnicity. Moldovans and Romanians are more likely to be proud of being born in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, 55.2% of young Gagauz, 40.0% of Bulgarians, 33.3% of Roma, 31.3% of Romanians, 29.6% of Moldovans, 28.6% of Russians, and 18.9% of Ukrainians believe that being born in Moldova makes their life harder. 70.9% of young people in the Republic of Moldova initially learned Romanian, 23.9% Russian, 3.0% Ukrainian, 1.3% Gagauz, and 0.9% Bulgarian. A significant number of young people prefer not to reveal their ethnic identity. Depending on the ethnicity variable, we note that Bulgarians, Gagauz, and Ukrainians are the most likely not to disclose their ethnic identity (Intercultural Dialogue among Young People in the Republic of Moldova (study commissioned by the NYCC) Financially supported by the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation Conducted by: Center for Investigation and Consultancy "SocioPolis" www.SocioPolis.md e-mail: Chişinău, 2008) pp. 56-59). Based on this comparison, we can report that the situation in 2025 has changed. Young people today show greater openness to European identity and an interest in the original culture of Moldovans, and they self-identify as bearers of their own ethnic identity.

The question of identity is closely linked to the concept of respect, and this does not just mean a willingness to put up with something different from one's own, but a human attitude —a recognition of the positive qualities of the other person. In order to develop respect for a person or their way of life, it is first necessary to know that person or to have an idea about them. Respect can be combined with tolerance, as it does not necessarily require agreement on who or what is being respected; it can be seen as a way of recognising the good qualities of the other person, with all their differences, thereby fostering tolerance. A tolerant and respectful attitude towards the other person and their way of life is a step towards interculturalism, as tolerance and respect are necessary conditions for effective intercultural dialogue. How is this goal realised at the Pedagogical University? To test a solution to this paradigm, we conducted research among the students of the Faculty of Arts at UPSC I.Creangă.

The investigation carried out at the Faculty of Arts yields certain results that cannot be considered final, as a deep, long-lasting approach to this subject is required. But the necessity of emphasising the issues in the problematic of cultural identities is clear. This study aimed to examine the identity issues faced by Russian-speaking youth.

Materials and methods

The actual implementation of the research involved distributing questionnaires and conducting surveys, as well as analysis and examination. The survey organisation included several stages. We allocated sufficient time for students to respond carefully and honestly, avoiding time pressure, to encourage authentic expression from respondents. Questionnaires were collected anonymously to respect confidentiality and to encourage

honest responses. The questions were constructed in such a way as to emphasize aspects of identity.

To the question: How do you feel attached to the Republic of Moldova?

1. I was born in this country
2. I live in this country
3. I am a citizen of this country
4. In this country, I feel that my civil and political rights are protected
5. I feel part of Moldovan culture

13 people out of 18 answered that they feel attached to the Republic of Moldova because they were born in, live in, and are citizens of this country. One answer was like: I have a neutral attitude towards Moldovan culture, The other two answers were negative, I am not part of Moldovan culture.

To the question Do you consider yourself a part of the Republic of Moldova only one answer was "I do not consider myself attached to it. I simply live" (student from Tiraspol). Answers such as I was born in this country, I live here, I am a citizen, and I feel part of Moldovan culture. were in the majority.

Respondents predominantly define their identity in terms of two criteria: citizenship and ethnic identity.

Those who feel attached to Moldovan culture also respond positively to the question of accepting European identity. Students show interest in Moldovan culture and, through this, develop a sense of respect for other ethnic identities. Students feel attached to the Republic of Moldova and are a part of Moldovan culture. They show loyalty to the Republic of Moldova and overwhelmingly see it as their only homeland. It is worth mentioning that people from mixed families more often say they feel part of Moldovan culture: "culture is my own." The word respect occurs frequently in the answers. Most students are open to communication with people from other cultures.

The concept of "respect" is not just a willingness to put up with something different from one's own culture, but a positive attitude, a recognition of the important qualities of another culture. To develop respect for a culture, it is necessary to know it or have an idea of it.

Thus, one answer is significant: "Before going to university, I didn't care about this culture. Now, after 3 years, I want to participate. I want to immerse myself in the historical process and realise that I am part of the country's culture. I was born here and therefore I carry a certain historical memory"

The question of protecting the culture of national minorities in the Republic of Moldova had contradictory answers:

Where are the rights of ethnic minorities better protected?

In the European Union, or

In Russia

Of 18 answers, seven said in the EU. Three wrote that they don't know, and two said that the rights of minorities are better respected in Russia. Six did not wish to answer. One particular answer was that in the Republic of Moldova, the culture of minorities is

destroyed, and the same respondent emphasised that in the USA and the EU, minority cultures are protected and appreciated.

Thus, we see that ideas are not sufficiently promoted, as the European Union, through the desideratum of the Rome Declaration of March 2017, endorsed by all Member States and EU institutions, advocates a Union that preserves cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity, and defends the rights of national minorities.

Culture, cultural heritage and cultural diversity are of particular value to European society in cultural, ecological, social and economic terms and are realised and supported through concrete measures. European culture is one of diversity, which rejects the levelling of cultures. Cultural Europe is a mosaic of diverse languages and cultures, preserved and respected. Through Europeanization, nations do not lose their cultural specificity; they do not move away from their traditional background, which generates a sense of national identity.

Question: Do I feel that my civil and cultural rights are protected in the Republic of Moldova?

Is the preservation of my ethnic and cultural identity threatened in the Republic? Out of 18 answers, 2 -partially in danger, 4 say that my identity is not in danger, 1 is not in danger, and 4 say that my ethnic identity is in danger:

My cultural identity is at risk. I do not feel fully protected in my civil and political rights.

All respondents use Russian as a language of communication. Bilingualism or multilingualism of these students means that they speak both their ethnic language and Russian, but not the state language. The students are highly aware and appreciative, but they don't study the state language. Students are open to accepting the multicultural aspect of society.

Do you have a sense of European identity?

Finally, we granted questions that presuppose the awareness of one's own identity.

How does a deep understanding of one's own cultural values, beliefs and customs influence the way you interpret messages received from people with different cultural identities? Can you give a concrete example?

Students (2) with weak self-identity do not show an understanding of other cultural messages. Thus, they say: I am not interested in different cultural views. Note that there are only two such answers.

- How does awareness of the unique aspects of your cultural identity help you navigate potentially conflictual or ambiguous intercultural communication situations?

3 students wrote that in such situations, they try to understand more deeply the causes of intercultural conflict

- Do you feel that a solid grounding in your own cultural identity makes you more open and empathetic to the cultural perspectives of others? Argue your answer.

5 students wrote that deep knowledge of their own culture helps them build bridges of understanding with others.

Many answers, however, were ... "don't know", "need to reflect".

The survey results highlight the importance of cultural awareness. A deep understanding of one's own cultural values, beliefs, and customs is essential for correctly interpreting messages from individuals with different cultural identities. This awareness helps avoid misunderstandings and facilitates effective intercultural communication. Students with a weakly defined identity seem to show a lack of interest in other cultural viewpoints, suggesting that a solid foundation in one's own cultural identity is necessary to appreciate and understand cultural diversity. Awareness of the unique aspects of one's cultural identity helps navigate potentially conflicting intercultural communication situations by trying to understand the deeper causes of the conflict. The majority of students who answered affirmatively believe that a solid foundation in their own cultural identity makes them more open and empathetic towards the cultural perspectives of others, allowing them to find common ground for understanding. Many responses indicated the need for further reflection on these questions, suggesting that the process of becoming aware of one's cultural identity and its impact on intercultural communication is complex and requires time and analysis.

We analysed the surveys to highlight identity-related barriers in promoting intercultural dialogue. Barriers in intercultural communication (from various perspectives) include:

Ethnocentrism and cultural superiority: The tendency to consider one's own culture superior to others obstructs openness to understanding and appreciating diversity. This perspective hinders the recognition of the value of other ways of thinking and living.

Stereotypes and prejudices: Simplistic and often negative generalisations about cultural groups erect walls between people, preventing the perception of individuals beyond labels and authentic interactions.

Lack of knowledge and cultural understanding: Ignorance of other cultures can generate erroneous interpretations, misunderstandings, and even fear of the "other." A lack of knowledge of others' customs and values can lead to incorrect conclusions.

Fear of loss of identity: The fear that intercultural dialogue might dilute or erode one's own cultural identity can lead to resistance to engaging with other cultures.

Historical traumas and intergroup conflicts: A past marked by conflicts or injustices between identity groups can leave deep scars, hindering the building of trust and dialogue. Painful memories can be difficult to overcome.

Linguistic and nonverbal communication differences: When language is unfamiliar, cultural nuances in verbal and nonverbal communication can lead to confusion and misinterpretation.

Closure in homogeneous groups: The natural tendency to associate with similar individuals limits exposure to diversity and can reinforce identity barriers. Exclusive interaction with people from the same group restricts opportunities to learn from other experiences.

The analysis of the responses highlights that students still tend to associate with similar individuals in communication. Not knowing Romanian is a significant barrier to communication.

Conclusions

As a result of the research, we summarise that, based on knowledge of one's own ethnic group and others' ethnic cultures, a set of perceptions emerges that constitutes a system of openness towards others. The research confirms that most respondents are open to intercultural dialogue. Students have a benevolent attitude towards communication with others and towards the European idea, and, compared to the republic's population, their acceptance of Europeanism is more pronounced. Significant identity-related barriers in communication remain the lack of knowledge of the state language and a minor narrowing of relationships with others. For the most part, students have a benevolent attitude towards the European idea, and compared to the general population of the republic, acceptance of the idea is... more distinctly shaped. The identity problem has become an important topic in the context of the need to legitimise national culture, which should serve as a binder for citizens and a unifying principle of cultural heritage. The solution based on the intercultural perspective assumes the principles of cooperation, mutual knowledge, and interaction among cultural identities. The common cultural identity in the vision starts with the idea of a shared destiny, thereby fully valuing political potential and national feeling. The conclusion is that it is necessary to increase efforts to deepen knowledge of European and national culture and civilisation. Tolerance through education and respect for other cultures and ethnicities is a fundamental bridge in building a democratic society. In both education and the social environment, approaching diversity requires tact, knowledge, and perseverance. Through research, education about the ethnicities that coexist in our state, and communication with many European nations, interethnic conflicts can be overcome and contribute to the prosperity of communities.

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