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Key Indicators of Language Impact on Identity Formation in Belarus

Tony Brown

I. Introduction
In 1986, a group of 28 intellectuals from Belarus wrote the following brief letter to then-General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev: “Language is the soul of a nation, the supreme manifestation of its cultural identity, the foundation of its true spiritual life. A nation lives and flourishes in history while its language lives. With the decline of the language, culture withers and atrophies, the nation ceases to exist as a historical organism” (Letters to Gorbachev, 1987).

Such sentiments regarding language and identity likewise resonate with scholars such as Helen Fedor (1995), for whom language and identity are inseparable sociocultural components, primordial in their relationship rather than acquired or developed. According to Fedor, a threat to language choice qualifies as a threat to one’s existence individually and collectively. Other scholars play down the inherently identific role of language by claiming that language plays an instrumental role and can be learned or activized when needed (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Yet even as a tool, Skutnabb-Kangas argues that language “cannot, by definition, be a neutral, ‘objective’, disencumbered tool. It is always interpretative and subjective, regardless of whether those using it know or admit it or not. It is both a tool for domination and a tool for change and self-determination. Language is creating and willing the world.” Language as a change agent or means of admitting one into multiple communities resonates strongly with the writings of C. Wright Mills (1956), who pointed out that “to have power requires access to major institutions, for the institutional positions men occupy determine in large part their chances to have and hold these valued experiences.”

Laitin (1998) describes what he views as two fundamental types of identity: personal identity, i.e. gender and race, which he claims remain fixed, unlike social identity that changes frequently, thus
enabling one to adopt an identity regardless of genetic, physiological, or historical factors. Conversely, Eckert (2000) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue that gender ideologies, which continually undergo transformation, largely dictate what language a child learns. Accordingly, the authors call into question gender as representing a fixed and immutable type of identity. Taking the matter one step further, identity formation, according to Dandaneu and Falcone (1998), presupposes identity abandonment; in other words, divulging oneself of identific norms altogether, e.g., “a home, neighborhood, city or nation,” and, subsequently, exposing oneself entirely to the vicissitudes of the world.

A more centrist approach to interpreting social identity than that advanced by Dandaneu and Falcone comes from Norton (1997), who defines social identity as “the relationship between the individual and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts.” Mediation as such invariably requires a common language (verbal or non-verbal), a means of transference and dissemination of ideas and information that serve to define oneself within a broader cultural context.

One finds a salient example of language interfacing with identity formation and arguably, identity loss in the Eastern European context of Belarus. The researcher concurs with Jernudd and Das Gupta’s (1971) assessment of language as a societal resource, which acquires importance in proportion to the “identific values” that members of a speech community grant it. Accordingly, Belarus’ sociolinguistic atmosphere bodes well for Russian, but acute for Belarusian. Today, native speakers of Belarusian find themselves in the position of representing a cultural titular minority struggling to preserve identific autonomy by promoting, as Williams (1997) points out, their national culture, including its language and social institutions. Clearly, opinions differ widely regarding what determines or constitutes identity; however in the context of Eastern Europe—and Belarus in particular—matters of language and identity sound a recurring theme throughout history, which theme reflects the thrust of the present research under consideration. Specifically, this research seeks to examine the degree to which language impacts individual and collective identity formation by addressing the following questions:

- Do respondents disproportionately prefer Belarusian to Russian as their native language versus their mother tongue? If so, how is
one to account for these differences between linguistic self-
identification and actual language behavior?
• Do respondents report to have concerns for the future of
Belarusian and, if so, to what extent does concern translate into
practical steps aimed at curbing language attrition in successive
generations?
• Does choice of language, i.e., Belarusian versus Russian,
demonstrate a gender preference?
• To what extent does internal language discourse in the form of
reading literature reflect external language discourse, such as
conversational language with friends? Does one type of
discourse more than the other provide a realistic representation of
current language usage in Belarus?
• Does choice of language vary significantly from domain to
domain, e.g., Belarusian and/or Russian when conversing with
friends versus with co-workers and associates in one’s sphere of
employment?
• To what extent do Belarusian and Russian differ prestige-wise for
respondents?

II. Historical Background

2.1 Political Developments in Belarus

Historically, language policy has played a significant role in the political,
social, and economic development of Belarus, particularly in the 20th
century. The New Economic Policy (NEP), implemented in 1921,
officially ended the regimental atmosphere of war communism and
 ushered in an era of liberal policies, including the 1921 policy of
korenizatsiia, or indigenization. Korenizatsiia had a two-fold purpose: “the
creation of national élites (affirmative action) and the promotion of local
national languages to a dominant position in the non-Russian territories
(linguistic korenizatsiia) (Martin, 2001). The founding of the Institute of
Belarusian Culture in 1921 played an important role in implementing the
objectives of Lenin’s policy of korenizatsiia relative to the Belarusian
language and culture.

As one of its principle objectives, the institute sought the
“perfection of the Belarusian literary language” (Lubachko, 1972). The
original plan of Belarusification that the Central Executive Committee of
the BSSR submitted to Moscow called for the following measures: “1)
introduction of the Belarusian language in the elementary, secondary,
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and advanced schools, 2) introduction of Belarusian as an official language in the Party, society, trade union, cooperative, and other organizations of the BSSR, and 3) use of the Belarusian language by all town and village populations” (Ibid.). The Central Executive Committee of the BSSR banned the use of Russian from courts, offices and, to a limited degree, homes.

By 1928, four Belarusian institutions of higher learning, six workers’ colleges, 30 technical institutes, 34 trade schools, 13 factory schools, seven technical schools, 277 eight-year public schools, 4,585 four-year public schools, and many other grammar schools and centers of learning operated in East Belarus (Vakar, 1956).

Just as the NEP symbolized the relaxation of control and the beginning of a national revival, the inauguration of the first five-year plan in 1928 marked the beginning of a return to greater centralized regulation of language and increasingly oppressive top-down policies issued by the Kremlin. Local nationalism rather than Great Power Chauvinism (suggesting Russian chauvinism in the minority republics) became the “greatest-danger principle” (Martin, 2001). Issues pertaining to national self-determination, such as language policy, subsequently deferred to the All-Union demands of the five-year plans that symbolized the building of a union of nations, which transcended borders and individual nationalities. Thus, what Soviet authorities claimed in the 1930s was a policy of “Internationalism” could perhaps more accurately be described today as a policy of “Russification.”

Stalin’s nationalities policy, dubbed as “national in form, socialist in content” (Ibid.) yielded to the military-driven Russification policy of the immediate pre-war and wartime years and beyond. Mobilization of the multi-ethnic Soviet army during World War II required absolute conformity to a single lingua franca for purposes of information dissemination. Thereafter, remnants of nationalist sentiment succumbed either willingly or under duress to socialist demands, contributing to what could be termed a policy of socialist in form and socialist in content.

Post-World War II Belarus witnessed a mass exodus from the villages to the heavily Russified urban centers, where large-scale industrialization projects offered work opportunities and improved

1 According to Martin (2001), Stalin originally formulated the phrase as “proletarian in content” and retained its usage until June 1930, when he shifted to the canonical “socialist in content.”
living conditions. The influx of workers from the countryside to the urban areas coupled with enormous losses in the Jewish population due to emigration contributed to a resurgence of the Belarusian language in cities. According to census data from 1959, the percentage of Belarusians, urban and rural, who claimed Belarusian as their native language rose to 93.0%, 77.5% representing the urban population specifically (Guthier). However, improvements in the socio-economic and political standing of Belarusian were short-lived, particularly in the capital of Minsk, as evidenced by census data from 1970, indicating that 54.5% of the population in Minsk reported Russian as their native language (Guthier). Statistics from 1984 indicate that Belarusians ranked last (15th) among union republics in members of the population capable of speaking their native language. Speakers of Belarusian made up 74.2% of the population, whereas in Russia, 99.9% of the population spoke Russian and in Ukraine 85.9% spoke Ukrainian (State Administration of Statistics, 1985).

Universities and other institutions of higher education in Belarus played a vital role in preserving Belarusian during the Soviet era. Unsurprisingly, efforts aimed at restoring the prestige and functionality of Belarusian during Perestroika and Glasnost emanated from members of the Belarus intelligentsia. Years of intense Russification policies, however, seriously hampered efforts by members of the intelligentsia to alter the sociolinguistic landscape in favor of Belarusian language and culture despite passage of the January 1990 language law declaring Belarusian the sole state language of the country.

Following the unsuccessful Kremlin coup in August 1991, Belarus reluctantly declared independence from the Soviet Union—undoubtedly a decision which, as Mark Beissinger (2002) points out, stemmed mainly from external pressure rather than internal mobilization of nationalist sentiment. Polls from 1993 indicate that “less than twenty-five percent of Belarusians knew their native tongue well and less than fifty percent were willing to promote the knowledge of it” (Gapanovich). Resentment on the part of governmental officials towards the 1990 language law also fueled an already heated presidential election in 1994.

Less than a year after being elected president of Belarus, Alaksandr Lukashenka sponsored a referendum in May 1995 that gave the citizens of Belarus the “choice” of maintaining a Belarusian-only language policy or granting Russian co-official language status alongside
Belarusian. The subsequent adoption of a Belarusian-Russian dual language policy significantly impeded Belarusification efforts, in that it enabled Russian to “compete” once again with Belarusian in official spheres. Since Russian had long enjoyed a privileged position in Belarus, the playing field for this competition was hardly a level one. But the situation in Belarus is not characterized simply by a binary choice between two resident languages.

2.2 Language Use and Language Choice in Belarus

The use of mixed speech, i.e., Belarusian mixed with Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian, further complicates matters of language maintenance in Belarus. Some members of the Belarus intelligentsia oppose the dual language policy on the grounds that it encourages mixed speech, thus diluting people’s command of Belarusian and Russian and desensitizing them to the correctness of their language usage. Negative judgments such as a “disgusting creature of Soviet assimilation,” a “perversion of the language system,” or a “Creolised pseudo-language,” characterize an overt disdain, particularly from Belarus’ intelligentsia community, toward the mixed form of speech (Ioffe). Yet beyond the linguistic and cognitive difficulties presented by mixed speech, opponents assert that trasianka also fosters mixed identity, thus potentially jeopardizing individual and collective Belarusian ethnic identity.

Regarding the relationship between trasianka and identity, Curt Woolhiser (2001) writes, “The preference for what is termed ‘mixed speech’ (meaning mixed Belarusian-Russian), rather than traditional dialect, standard Belarusian or standard Russian, in in-group interaction can be interpreted as an expression of a hybrid cultural identity.” As Alexandra Goujon (1999) notes with regards to language and identity, “For Belarusian nationalists, language represents, both symbolically and ethnically, the nation. ‘National unity’ is then intrinsically linked to language.” According to this view, national unity comes under attack

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2 Participants in the May 1995 referendum responded to the following question: “Do you agree with granting the Russian language equal status with Belarusian?” Due to the manipulative phrasing of the question, which undermines its reliability as an accurate indicator of public opinion, the researcher chose not to use such data when assessing language choice and utilization in Belarus.

3 In this article the term “mixed speech” refers specifically to a type of Creole pejoratively referred to by nationally oriented intellectuals in Belarus as trasianka (literally a mixture of hay and straw).
when an outside language receives equal status with the national language and mixing of the two languages occurs. But what of the numerous examples of symbiotic language mixing in other cultures—what makes the situation of Belarus different? Belarusian history presents a recurring pattern of the native language functioning as a medium of opposition. Such was the case during tsarist times, during the Soviet era, and most recently during the presidential tenure of Alaksandr Lukashenka. The use of Belarusian, especially in certain domains, signifies defiance of central political authority. The current political ideology favors unification with Russia—not only economically but culturally in the form of language sharing. Thus, a symbiotic relationship between two languages cannot begin to exist when native language usage calls into question one’s political allegiance.

Data from the 1999 census in Belarus shed light on the current demographics of the country, including the relationship between responses to the questions of nationality and native language. According to census data, the population of Belarus totals 10,045,000 persons. Of that number, 6,961,000 persons (69%) live in urban centers, whereas 3,084,000 persons (31%) live in rural regions. Of the urban dwellers, two-thirds live in 15 cities with populations that exceed 100,000 persons (Narodnaia gazeta, 1999).

The census reports that more than 130 nationalities reside in Belarus. Those participating in the census responded to the question of nationality (национальность) according to their own understanding of the terminological meaning; adults indicated the nationality of their children (Ibid.), as shown in Figure 1.4

According to census results, 81.0% of the population self-identify as Belarusian; 11.0% as Russian; ~4.0% as Polish; 2.0% as Ukrainian; and 0.3% as Jewish (Natsional’naia ekonomicheskaia gazeta, 2000). Approximately 82.0% of responses to the question of native language (родной язык) cited in the census correspond with individuals’ self-reported nationality. In addition to questions of native language and nationality, respondents reported the language(s) they usually speak at home. Census figures indicate that 3,683,000 persons (37.0%) claimed to speak Belarusian at home (На каком языке Вы обычно разговариваете

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дома?), of which 3,373,000 persons (92.0%) are of Belarusian nationality. Interestingly, 6,308,000 persons claimed to speak Russian at home (63.0%), of which 4,783,000 (76.0%) are of Belarusian nationality (Ibid.).

**Figure 1: Nationalities Cited in 1999 Census**

As indicated by the above census figures, speakers of Belarusian at home represent a minority in Belarus, although they overwhelmingly self-identify as Belarusian. Such a phenomenon also applies to speakers of Russian at home, over three-quarters of whom (76.0%) self-identify as Belarusian, hence, the disparity between respondents’ language(s) usually spoken at home and their self-reported nationality. Analogously, census figures reveal the disparity between respondents’ language(s) usually spoken at home and their self-reported native language.

**III. Methodology**

3.1 **Regions Investigated**

Data used in this research were collected in three urban centers in Belarus: Minsk, Grodno, and Vitebsk.\(^5\) Each city has a distinctive history from both a geographical and linguistic standpoint. In an effort to

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\(^5\) Funding for this research was made possible through grants from the American Councils for International Education and Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

3.2 Data Gathering
The researcher arranged for three local university students from Minsk to administer the questionnaire under the auspices of European Humanities University. All three fieldworkers administered the questionnaire in Minsk; one of them traveled with the researcher to Grodno and Vitebsk for the same purpose. The fieldworkers administered questionnaires to students congregated in halls near classrooms during the week of final exams. They also asked students entering and exiting campus buildings to respond to the questionnaire. The data presented here represent self-reports from 559 Belarusian students born in Belarus, attending eight different institutions of higher education. The responses received from 85 students born outside of Belarus were not included.

Due to the strong political and nationalist sensitivities associated with speaking Belarusian in public domains, those administering the questionnaire approached potential survey participants in Russian, currently the unmarked form of speech, in order to avoid introducing bias in the administration of the survey instrument. Upon consenting to participate in the study, each participant was free to choose to answer the questionnaire in either Belarusian or Russian.

Respondents were mainly young (18-21) and received the bulk of their education subsequent to Belarus declaring independence in 1991.

3.3 Data Re-coding
The format of the questionnaire allowed participants to indicate multiple categories, thus necessitating re-coding of the data for statistical analysis. As a rule, the researcher recorded each response as indicated on the questionnaire. Only after coding the data and analyzing it did the researcher re-code portions for practical reasons. Answers provided for the question of languages in one’s personal library consisted of the following: 1) only in Belarusian, 2) majority in Belarusian, 3) in Belarusian and Russian languages, 4) majority in Russian, and 5) only in Russian. Instead of limiting their responses to one of the choices provided, participants occasionally marked two or more choices, often similar, but distinctly coded all the same. The researcher re-coded mixed
responses as follows: 1) majority in Belarusian, in Belarusian and Russian → majority in Belarusian, 2) majority in Russian, only in Russian → only in Russian, and 3) Belarusian and Russian, majority in Russian → majority in Russian. The above method of re-coding emphasizes the stronger of two responses, only versus majority or majority versus no statement of majority.

Similarly, respondents occasionally marked multiple answers when answering the question, “When you relax, in what language do you prefer to read books?” (Когда Вы отдыхаете, на каком языке Вы предпочитаете читать книги?). Answers provided in the questionnaire consisted of 1) in Belarusian, 2) in Russian, and 3) in Belarusian and Russian equally. Multiple responses from participants resulted in redundancy, thus prompting the re-coding of data in order to consolidate like responses. Statistical analyses reflect the following re-codings: 1) in Russian, in Belarusian and Russian equally → in Belarusian and Russian equally, and 2) in Belarusian, in Russian → in Belarusian and Russian equally.

IV. Key Concepts
4.1 Native Language

Davies (2003) points out that the term “native language” has historical and linguistic ties to the cognate naïf (Old French) meaning “natural, with the sense of not being able to help it.” Such a definition extends to accommodate changing identities, i.e., adoption of individuals into a new group, with the caveat that one successfully demonstrate to the old and new groups “that the natural and the naïf are in harmony, that as well as consciously adopting the new group, at the same time one can’t help it, that the adoption is without apparent effort” (Ibid.).


The English “nation” is defined by its relation to the state, whereas, for example, the Czech “narod” is defined by its relation to the ethnicity. For this reason, the transformation of an ethnic identity to a national one is, in Slavic languages (with perhaps the exception of Polish), understood as a change, a “process” inside
one and the same entity, whereas in English it means two different qualities. This semantic difference also explains why language (ethnically defined identity) played such an important role in Eastern Europe in comparison to the national movements in the English-speaking world—Ireland and Scotland.

Similarly, Dan Davidson (2004) demonstrates in his research dealing with word associations among Russian and American college-age students that the same word when translated into Russian and English can resonate with considerable different connotative meaning for speakers of each language. This semantic relationship helps to explain the complex meaning of the term “native language” (родной язык) and why significant discrepancies in native language versus mother-tongue self-reporting can occur.

In relation to Belarus specifically, Woolhiser (2001) observes “that a person’s ‘native language’ (Belarusian родная мова, Russian родной язык) can be one other than the language which a person has spoken since early childhood and uses in everyday communication.” So as to test for a discrepancy in language usage, the study addresses both self-reported native language and mother tongue.

4.2 Mother Tongue
Mother-tongue data, reflecting responses to the question “In which language did you speak with your mother in childhood?” (На каком языке Вы говорили в детстве с матерью?), serve as an important indicator of one’s base language, especially in the home. Davies’ (2003) definition of “mother tongue” attempts to eliminate unnecessary complexity and focus maximally on the literal meaning of the term, that is “the language of the mother and is based on the normal enough view that children’s first significant other is the mother.” Slama-Cazacu (1986) likewise asserts that the definition of a mother tongue has reference to “origins” and “affective links” more than “qualities.” Hence, the biological connection inherent in the definition, yet, as Davies (2003) notes, the definition should account for non-biological mother figures as well in the form of a father, grandparent, nurse, adoptive parent, or other caretaker. Accordingly, Slama-Cazacu (1986) argues that one can have

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6 See, for example, Davidson’s (2004) analysis of American and Russian responses to the words motherland/родина, language/язык, country/страна, and government/государство.
two mother tongues, given that one learns them at more or less the same time and has strong affective associations between the languages and family members mostly.

Aside from “origin” as the basis for defining mother tongue, other criteria such as “identification” (internal and external identification with a language as a native speaker), “competence” (one’s strongest language), and “function” (language one uses most frequently) each contribute to the terminological understanding of “mother tongue” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Such criteria allow one to change one’s mother tongue multiple times, depending on individual circumstances.

In this study, mother-tongue data primarily seek to ascertain whether a significant number of participants who report Belarusian as their native language prefer to speak Russian in ordinary conversation. The decision to frame the dominant language in terms of mother tongue stems from findings in Rivers (2003), which indicate that females prefer to raise their children speaking the dominant language owing to its potential for greater economic mobility.

V. Findings
5.1 Native Language and Mother Tongue
In discussing responses to the question of native language, this study seeks to ascertain the extent to which one’s native language significantly influences reported language utilization among university-age students in Belarus. Assuming, as did Soviet scholars, that ethnic identity corresponds with native language (Silver, 1974), then three major ethnic identities bear relevance to this study: Russian, Belarusian, and mixed Belarusian and Russian.

Participant responses indicate that 189 (34.6%) claimed Russian as their native language while 168 (30.7%) claimed Belarusian as their native language. Interestingly, 150 (27.4%) claimed mixed Belarusian and Russian as their native language.

The relative high frequency of “Belarusian” responses to the question of one’s native language offers potentially important information about Belarusian national self-awareness. However, almost the same number of participants considered mixed Belarusian and Russian their native language as participants who considered Belarusian—a finding that reveals a sizable population committed neither to Belarusian nor Russian exclusively.
When compared with responses to the question of native language, mother-tongue data indicate a significant increase in the number of “Russian” responses. Of the 545 participants who responded to the question of mother tongue, 376 (69.0%) indicated Russian as their mother tongue as opposed to only 36 participants (6.6%) who indicated Belarusian as their mother tongue. Mixed responses of Belarusian and Russian to the question of mother tongue decreased to 112 or 20.6%.

In order to test for significance in the relationship between native language and mother tongue, the study cross-tabulates responses to both questions, as presented in Table 1.

### Table 1: Cross-Tabulation of Mother Tongue versus Native Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Tongue</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belarusian</td>
<td>Bel/Rus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarusian</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel/Rus</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel/Pol</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>113.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>165.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 196.008$; df = 16; $\alpha$ (2-tailed) = .000

The data reveal a striking contrast in the number of respondents who indicated Belarusian as their native language as well as their mother tongue. Cross-tabulated data indicate that of the 165 participants who claimed Belarusian as their native language, only 28 claimed it as their mother tongue, whereas 179 of the 188 who claimed Russian as their native language also claimed it as their mother tongue. Of the 149 participants who claimed mixed Belarusian and Russian as their native language, only 50 claimed the mixture of both languages as their mother tongue; the majority of the remaining individuals indicated Russian as their mother tongue.
5.2 Language of Questionnaire

Taking into account the politically and emotionally charged issue of language in Belarus, a comparison of questionnaires answered in Belarusian with those answered in Russian can reveal central tendencies among the two groups and determine whether over-representation occurs in response to questions such as one’s native language. Among participants who responded to the questionnaire in Belarusian, there was a strong correlation between the native language and language chosen for the questionnaire. Of the 69 participants who responded to the question of native language using the Belarusian questionnaire, over half (43 or 62.3%) indicated Belarusian as their native language while 13 (18.8%) indicated mixed Belarusian and Russian. Only nine of the 69 participants (13.0%) who selected the Belarusian questionnaire indicated Russian as their native language.

Of the 478 participants who answered the Russian language questionnaire, 180 (37.7%) indicated Russian as their native language, 137 (28.7%) indicated mixed Belarusian and Russian, and 125 (26.2%) indicated Belarusian. The relative high frequency of “Belarusian” responses to the question of one’s native language as selected for the Russian language questionnaire further indicates the distortion (linguistically) of the term “native.”

Responses to the question of mother tongue among those who selected the Belarusian language questionnaire reveal a different tendency than that of responses to the question about one’s native language. The data do not show an over-representation of Belarusian mother-tongue responses. In fact, 39 participants (54.9%) reported Russian as their mother tongue, whereas only 14 participants (19.7%) reported Belarusian as their mother tongue. Such a finding further underscores the symbolic versus pragmatic function associated with Belarusian.

Frequency data for responses to the question of mother tongue for those participants who selected the Russian language questionnaire reveal a strong tendency towards Russian. Of the 474 participants who responded to the question of mother tongue using the Russian language questionnaire, 337 (71.1%) reported Russian as their mother tongue. Mixed Belarusian and Russian received 96 responses (20.3%)—a higher frequency than Belarusian, which received only 22 responses (4.6%).
5.3 City

The study was conducted in three urban centers in Belarus: the capital, Minsk, lies in the geographical center of the country, while Grodno and Vitebsk differ in terms of cultural and linguistic traditions. Grodno is more closely associated with Belarusian tradition, and Vitebsk closely to Russian. Distributions of native language responses according to cities in which participants study at an institution of higher education were analyzed to test for regional differences.

Figure 2: Cross-Tabulation of Native Language versus City

![Figure 2: Cross-Tabulation of Native Language versus City](image)

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 22.493$; df = 8; $\alpha$ (2-tailed) = .004

Chi-square tests indicate statistical significance at the .01 level between the two variables, thus suggesting significant regional differences in urban language use. The proximity of Grodno to the Polish border most likely affects the number of mixed Belarusian and Polish responses from participants (Grodno=10, Minsk=1, Vitebsk=2).

Self-reported mother-tongue data according to the city do not reveal a statistically significant distribution. Responses from Grodno and Vitebsk showed similar tendencies, at times mirroring one another. Responses to the question of mother tongue in each of the cities reveal an
overwhelming preference for Russian. Mixed Belarusian and Russian responses received the second highest number of responses in each city.

Figure 3: Cross-Tabulation of Mother Tongue versus City

![Figure 3: Cross-Tabulation of Mother Tongue versus City](image)

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 15.956; \text{df} = 8; \alpha (2\text{-tailed}) = .043$

Regional differences in “native language” and “mother tongue” responses suggest that regional differences significantly impact “native language” responses, whereas they do not significantly affect participants’ “mother tongue” responses. In addition, “native language” findings reveal that the historical, cultural, and linguistic traditions associated with the three regions examined in this study play an insignificant role for this generation. Vitebsk, a predominantly Russian city situated on the border of Belarus and Russia, had a higher number of Belarusian “native language” responses than Grodno, a city located on the Belarus-Poland borderlands and historically associated with the Belarusian language; Grodno received the lowest number of Belarusian “native language” responses. Minsk, the heart of Belarus’ intelligentsia, received the highest number of Russian “native language” responses while Grodno received the second highest and Vitebsk the least.
5.4 Language Concern

Participant responses to the question “Are you concerned about the future of Belarusian in your country?” (Вы беспокоитесь за будущее белорусского языка в Вашей стране?) clarify commonly held opinions of Belarusian among university-age students and afford, as Mechkovskaia (2002) asserts, the most accurate indicator of the future of a language. Accordingly, governmental language planning and policies will have negligible long-term consequences if people, particularly students, demonstrate indifference or antagonism toward the national language.

Recalling that participants could choose whether to respond to the questionnaire in Belarusian or Russian, questionnaire language data alone provide a healthy indication of language utilization. Figure 4 presents cross-tabulated data concerning language of the questionnaire and concern about the future of Belarusian.

The data in Figure 4 illustrate a clear relationship between questionnaire language and respondents’ concern about Belarusian. With the exception of one individual, respondents to the Belarusian language questionnaire overwhelmingly expressed a concern about the future of Belarusian—a finding that demonstrates significance at the .01 level. Participants who responded to the Russian language questionnaire also indicated a concern about the future of Belarusian, albeit moderate compared with responses from the Belarusian language questionnaire. Overall, 375 of the 536 participants who responded to the above question indicated a concern about the future of Belarusian.

Similar statistical significance results when cross-tabulating self-reported data relative to respondents’ concern about the future of Belarusian versus native language.

The data in Figure 5 suggest a strong relationship between respondents who indicated Belarusian as their native language and those who indicated that they have concerns about the future of Belarusian. Less than one out of every ten respondents that claimed Belarusian as his/her native language designated “no” as a response to the question of concern about the future of Belarusian. Respondents who indicated mixed Belarusian and Russian as their native language also indicated an unexpectedly strong concern about the future of Belarusian. Overall, the number of affirmative responses with regards to concern about Belarusian exceeded the number of negative responses by over two
times. Interestingly, the only category of native language respondents with fewer responses in the affirmative than in the negative was composed of respondents who indicated Russian as their native language.

This study further analyzes mother-tongue data in its relationship with participants’ responses to the question of concern about the future of Belarusian.

Percentage-wise, more Belarusian mother-tongue respondents than Belarusian native language respondents expressed concern about the future of Belarusian (compare Figures 5 and 6). Mixed Belarusian and Russian mother-tongue respondents indicated a strong concern about the future of Belarusian, as did mixed Belarusian and Polish mother-tongue respondents. Although these respondents represented the majority in the above cross-tabulation, over half of them indicated concern about the future of Belarusian.

Figure 4: Cross-Tabulation of Respondents’ Concern about the Future of Belarusian versus Questionnaire Language

![Chart showing cross-tabulation of respondents' concern about the future of Belarusian versus questionnaire language.]

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 30.799; \ df = 1; \ \alpha \ (2\text{-tailed}) = .000$
Figure 5: Cross-Tabulation of Respondents’ Concern about the Future of Belarusian versus Native Language

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 87.885; df = 4; \alpha$ (2-tailed) = .000

Figure 6: Cross-Tabulation of Respondents’ Concern about the Future of Belarusian versus Mother Tongue

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 48.284; df = 4; \alpha$ (2-tailed) = .000
5.5 Gender

To clarify the role of gender in participant responses, cross-tabulations with native language, mother tongue, and concern about the future of Belarusian were conducted. The data for the aforementioned analyses appear respectively.

**Figure 7: Cross-Tabulation of Native Language versus Gender**

![Bar graph showing cross-tabulation of native language versus gender]

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 12.912; \text{df} = 4; \alpha (2\text{-tailed}) = .012$

Data from the above cross-tabulation suggest that more females than males claimed Russian as their native language (105 versus 84 respectively), whereas a substantially higher number of males than females claimed Belarusian as their native language (103 versus 65 respectively).

Results for mother-tongue responses by gender differ somewhat. Self-reported data reflect a relatively even distribution of responses from both females and males to the category of “Russian” (187 versus 189 respectively) and “Belarusian” (15 versus 21 respectively). Statistically, the data show less significance for mother tongue than for language and gender, thus suggesting that males especially associate ethnic identity with native language more than with mother tongue.
Figure 8: Cross-Tabulation of Mother Tongue versus Gender

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 2.437; \text{df} = 4; \alpha (2\text{-tailed}) = .656$

Figure 9: Cross-Tabulation of Respondents’ Concern about the Future of Belarusian versus Gender

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 1.895; \text{df} = 1; \alpha (2\text{-tailed}) = .169$
Cross-tabulated data analyzing gender in relation to participants’ concerns about the future of Belarusian suggest that genders possibly assign varying identific values to languages, perhaps stemming from their supposed utility.

Over two-thirds of the respondents who answered the question regarding concern about the future of Belarusian self-reported “yes.” Interestingly, a greater number of females than males indicated concern for the language. Both genders show substantially fewer individuals who do not report having a concern about the future of Belarusian than who do.

5.6 Personal Library
This study further seeks to determine whether literature in the home serves as a key indicator of language utilization. Respondents answered the following question regarding their personal library, “In what language do you have books at home?” (На каком языке у Вас имеются дома книги?). Answers to choose from included, “only in Belarusian,” “majority in Belarusian,” “in Belarusian and Russian languages,” “majority in Russian,” and “only in Russian.” Drawing on the premise that reading represents a form of inward speech, the study attempts to ascertain whether respondents’ reading language reflects their verbal language with family and friends.

The category of “majority in Russian” received the highest number of responses (258 or 47.0%) followed by the broader category of “in Belarusian and Russian” with 241 responses or 43.9%. Relatively few respondents (35 or 6.4%) indicated that their personal collection consisted of literature only in Russian; even fewer respondents (13 or 2.4%) indicated that the majority of their personal library consisted of literature in Belarusian, and the fewest (2 or 0.4%) indicated that their personal library consisted only of literature in Belarusian.

An analysis of internal versus external speech begins with a cross-tabulation of languages comprising one’s personal library versus native language. By cross-tabulating the aforementioned variables, the study seeks to ascertain whether languages represented in respondents’

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7 Voloshinov (1929) broadens the traditional definition of dialogue understood as direct, face-to-face, vocalized verbal communication to include indirect verbal communication, which he refers to as verbal performance in print—meaning verbal communication when reading.
personal library play a symbolic or functional role, similar to that of one’s native language versus mother tongue, respectively.

**Figure 10: Cross-Tabulation of Languages Comprising Respondents’ Personal Library versus Native Language**

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 104.416; \text{df} = 16; \alpha (2\text{-tailed}) = .000$

Data from Figure 10 indicate a significant difference in one’s stated native language and the language of books in one’s personal library. Responses to the category of books “only in Russian” and “majority in Russian” from participants who indicated Russian as their native language well exceeded the expected count. Of those respondents whose personal library consisted of books in “Belarusian and Russian,” the number of Belarusian native language respondents exceeded that of Russian native language respondents by more than two times. Of the 13 respondents who indicated that the majority of their personal library consisted of books in Belarusian, 11 indicated Belarusian as their native language.

**5.7 Literature Read for Leisure**
In addition to the question of language of books in one’s personal library, participants responded to the question, “When you relax, in what
language do you prefer to read books?” (Когда Вы отдыхаете, на каком языке Вы предпочитаете читать книги?). This question seeks to shed light on whether one’s preferred language of reading for leisure correlates more with one’s ethnic identity, often synonymous with native language, or with one’s everyday modicum of communication, namely mother tongue.

Of the 559 participants, 367 (65.7%) indicated that they preferred to read in Russian for leisure. A substantial number of respondents indicated that they enjoy reading in Belarusian and Russian equally for leisure (163 or 29.2%) while only 29 respondents (5.2%) indicated that they like to read only in Belarusian for leisure.

A cross-tabulation of responses to personal library versus reading for leisure helps to extract significant disparities and/or similarities in participant responses, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Cross-Tabulation of Languages Comprising Respondents’ Personal Library versus Languages used when Reading for Leisure

![Cross-Tabulation Chart]

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 197.453$; df = 8; $\alpha$ (2-tailed) = .000

Respondents whose personal library contains books “Only in Russian” unanimously indicated that they read in Russian for leisure; a substantially higher than expected number of participants whose
personal library contains a majority of books in Russian also read in Russian for leisure. However, “Belarusian and Russian equally” and “Russian” categories received an almost equal number of responses from participants whose personal library consisted of works in Belarusian and Russian—the “Belarusian and Russian equally” figure exceeding the expected total by a wide margin.

In addition to inquiring as to participants’ preferred language when reading for leisure, the study seeks to determine whether participants have access to desirable reading material in the preferred language. In other words, do governmental and/or private publishing houses print the works that participants desire to read and in the language they desire to read them? The question reads, “Are books that interest you published in the language in which you prefer to read them? Yes or No” (Издаются ли книги, интересующие Вас, на том языке, на котором Вы предпочитаете их читать? Да или Нет). Indirectly, this question attempts to determine whether access to published materials in preferred languages poses the limiting factor, or whether personal preference drives one’s choice of reading material.

Self-reported data indicate that 489 participants (89.4%) indicated that they can find published copies of the works they enjoy reading in the language they prefer to read them. Only 58 participants (10.6%) indicated that published works in the language they desire to read do not exist.

Cross-tabulation of publication language with reading language for leisure helps to determine whether one or more languages suffer from under-representation in terms of publication and dissemination, as shown in Figure 12.

The data suggest that a substantial fraction of the participants who read in Belarusian for leisure cannot find desired works published in Belarusian (11 out of 27 participants). This number exceeds the expected count by almost four times. Very few participants who indicated that they prefer to read in Russian find it difficult to locate published works in Russian. Those who indicated that they enjoy reading in Belarusian and Russian equally for enjoyment encountered a similar problem as those who indicated that they enjoy reading solely in Belarusian for leisure.
5.8 Language with Friends

In an effort to ascertain the degree to which diglossia can be observed among university-age students, this research compares respondents’ language spoken at home with language spoken outside of the home while associating with friends. Respondents’ answers included a wide variety of languages as well as combinations of languages, many of which represented only one or two individuals. Rather than analyze the entire list of responses, this study examines the six most frequently cited languages—remaining languages comprise the “Other” category.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (386 or 69.1%) indicated Russian as the language they speak with friends; in stark contrast, only nine respondents (1.6%) indicated that they speak Belarusian with their friends. Mixed Belarusian and Russian received 63 responses (11.3%) and “Other” received 54 responses (9.7%). Several participants (29 or 5.2%) indicated that they speak Belarusian and Russian with their friends (meaning separate and distinct as opposed to mixed). In addition, 15 respondents (2.7%) indicated that they speak
Russian and English with their friends; mixed Belarusian and Polish only received three responses (0.5%).

Considering the relatively low frequency of Belarusian usage among peers in casual conversation, the study seeks to clarify which participants who self-reported to speak Belarusian and/or Russian with friends likewise report having a concern for the future of Belarusian. Data for such cross-tabulated data appear below in Figure 13.

**Figure 13: Cross-Tabulation of Respondents’ Concern about the Future of Belarusian versus Language Utilization with Friends**

![Bar Chart]

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 40.577; \text{df} = 6; \alpha (2\text{-tailed}) = .000$

Interestingly, all nine of the respondents who indicated that they speak Belarusian with their friends also indicated a concern about the future of Belarusian. Mixed language respondents also indicated concern for Belarusian, as did respondents who indicated that they speak Belarusian and Russian (distinctly) with their friends. Of the 372 respondents who indicated Russian as the language they speak with their friends, almost two-thirds of them also expressed concern about the future of Belarusian.

Cross-tabulation of gender with language spoken with friends further clarifies the linguistic milieu.
Key Indicators of Language Impact on Identity Formation in Belarus
Tony Brown

5.9 Language Prestige

When a language becomes ostracized in society, the home often becomes the last linguistic bastion. As Scotton (1982) points out, “Using one’s mother tongue at home is removed from but relevant to the on-going public competition because it is a symbol of self-assertion; it is in clear defiance of the norms which require using certain lingua francas in public and of the socioeconomic order which they symbolize.” Participants in this study responded to the following question regarding language prestige: “Do you consider this [Belarusian and/or Russian] language prestigious?” (Считается ли этот язык престижным?). Rather than marking “yes” or “no” in terms of language prestige for both languages, some participants indicated “yes” or “no” for only one of the languages, thereby creating ambiguity in terms of the unmarked
language. Due to the possibility of discovering implied meaning behind participants’ omitted answers, the researcher created additional categories to accommodate unanticipated combinations of responses, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Language Prestige

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel no/Rus yes</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel yes/Rus yes</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rus yes</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel yes</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel no/Rus no</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel no</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel yes/Rus no</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rus no</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data indicate that 188 participants (34.8%) considered Belarusian non-prestigious and Russian prestigious. This frequency ranks the highest in this data set and justifiably raises concerns about the future viability of Belarusian. The second highest frequency of responses belongs to the Belarusian prestigious and Russian prestigious categories with 133 participants (24.6%). Interestingly, 93 participants (17.2%) responded to the question of language prestige by marking “yes” beneath Russian but leaving the box for Belarusian empty. Naturally, omissions raise questions about the participants’ intentions and motives. On the one hand, the matter could quite simply reflect participant oversight and have no other underlying significance. On the other hand, one could interpret this type of response as indicating participants’ disregard for a language—a sign of unwillingness to acknowledging the language’s existence, much less its prestige.

Participants responded similarly in terms of Belarusian by marking “yes” and leaving the Russian language box empty. Such responses only totaled 41 (7.6%), but deserve noting all the same. Relatively few respondents considered both Belarusian and Russian non-prestigious (33 or 6.1%). In terms of Belarusian as a non-prestigious language with no mention of Russian, 30 participants (5.6%) responded in this manner. A small enclave of respondents (18 or 3.3%) considered
Belarusian prestigious and Russian non-prestigious. Finally, four respondents (0.7%) considered Russian non-prestigious with no statement of Belarusian.

In addition to gender comparisons with participant responses to the question of concern about the future of Belarusian, this study seeks to ascertain whether gender differences significantly affect participants' consideration of Belarusian and/or Russian as prestigious. Cross-tabulation of gender with language prestige helps to unravel the question of whether one gender in particular maintains a certain bias.

**Figure 15: Cross-Tabulation of Gender versus Language Prestige**

![Cross-Tabulation of Gender versus Language Prestige](image)

Chi-Squared: $\chi^2 = 6.879$; df = 7; $\alpha$ (2-tailed) = .442

Although the results contained in the above cross-tabulation lack statistical significance, some patterns emerge that resemble patterns discussed previously. For example, cross-tabulation of native language versus gender (see Figure 7) revealed a greater propensity on the part of males to indicate Belarusian as their native language than on the part of females. The cross-tabulation of language prestige with gender shows parallel trends; a greater number of males than females considered (1) Belarusian and Russian prestigious languages, (2) Belarusian prestigious and Russian non-prestigious, and (3) Belarusian prestigious with no
mention of Russian. Females consistently indicated a preference for Russian as evidenced in the following categories: (1) Belarusian non-prestigious and Russian prestigious and (2) Russian prestigious with no mention of Belarusian. And yet, cross-tabulation of gender with concern for language discussed earlier reveals that females share a proportionally greater concern for Belarusian than males—a finding that seemingly contradicts other gender cross-tabulations in this study. Arriving at any legitimate explanation to the apparent contradiction would require substantial follow-up research, the scope of which exceeds the parameters of this study.

5.10 Language of Prospective Employment

A language’s functional role of improving one’s chances of obtaining gainful employment also contributes greatly to its overall survivability in a competitive environment. Participants responded to the question, “Do you consider that knowing this language will enhance your opportunity for finding work?” (Пологаете ли Вы, что зная этот язык, Вы получите лучшую возможность устроиться на работу?). The questionnaire provided boxes labeled “yes” and “no” under the language categories of “Belarusian” and “Russian.” As with the question of language prestige, participants responded in an unanticipated manner, thus necessitating the inclusion of additional categories. In response to the possible implied meaning associated with omitted answers to either “yes” or “no,” the researcher chose to represent each of the permutations.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Prospective Employment Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel yes/Rus yes</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel no/Rus yes</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rus yes</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel yes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel no/Rus no</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel yes/Rus no</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel no</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rus no</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>528</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Missing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>559</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to the question of language prestige, participants ranked Belarusian “yes” and Russian “yes” the highest—in this instance, 208 participants (39.4%) indicated that knowledge of Belarusian and Russian would enhance their opportunities of obtaining employment. Conversely, a relatively high frequency of participants indicated that knowledge of Belarusian would not be beneficial, whereas knowledge of Russian would (145 or 27.5%). Knowledge of Russian with no mention of Belarusian received a relatively high frequency of responses (97 or 18.4%); remaining responses declined substantially with 34 participants (6.4%) indicating the need to know Belarusian with no mention of Russian. Some respondents considered neither Belarusian nor Russian useful in obtaining employment (27 or 5.1%) while nine participants (1.7%) indicated that knowledge of Belarusian would help and knowledge of Russian would not. Finally, seven participants (1.3%) indicated that knowing Belarusian would not be useful with no mention of Russian, while only one participant (0.2%) responded that knowledge of Russian would not be useful with no mention of Belarusian.

In an attempt to understand what participants meant by omitting a response to the functional role of Belarusian in seeking employment, the study cross-tabulates responses to the questions of language of concern versus language of employment. In other words, did participants intentionally omit a response regarding Belarusian and by so doing, make a statement, or did they simply neglect to answer the question fully? Figure 16 presents the results of the above cross-tabulation.

Of the 92 participants who indicated that knowing Russian assists in finding employment with no mention of Belarusian, 41 indicated that they had no concern about the future of Belarusian—a number that well exceeds the expected count of 27.9. Interestingly, of the 34 participants who indicated that knowing Belarusian would facilitate finding employment with no mention of Russian, all 34 indicated a concern about the future of Belarusian. In the case of respondents who indicated that knowing Belarusian would facilitate finding employment with no mention of Russian, such responses suggest an especially strong loyalty to one language without any regard for the existence of the other. Thus, omissions in participant responses to a language category in this study appear to suggest more than mere oversight.
VI. Summary of Findings

6.1 Native Language and Mother Tongue
The findings from this study raise important questions into the effects of prolonged language subordination on individual and collective linguistic identity. Clearly a shift towards Russian appears to be happening on two linguistic fronts—native language and mother tongue. The question of one’s native language elicited three major responses: Russian (34.6%), Belarusian (30.7%), and mixed Belarusian and Russian (27.4%). In contrast, the question of one’s mother tongue elicited an overwhelming Russian language response (69.0%), whereas only 6.6% of the participants reported Belarusian as their mother tongue. The Belarusian mother-tongue component has all but disappeared. The Belarusian native language component continues to hold a relatively strong presence, likely owing to the association of native language with ethnic identity.
6.2 Concern about the Future of Belarusian

One can perform a simple litmus test of a language’s viability by asking young people whether they have concerns about its future. Responses to the question, “Are you concerned about the future of Belarusian?” suggest that by and large, university-age students in Belarus do have concerns about the future of the language. Unsurprisingly, participants who responded to the questionnaire in Belarusian overwhelmingly expressed concern about its future. Choosing to respond to the questionnaire in Belarusian in itself signifies a commitment to a language that in practice has relatively little utilitarian value in society.

Cross-tabulating native language versus concern about Belarusian fleshes out additional participants concerned about Belarusian. Those participants who indicated Belarusian or one of its mixed variants as a native language dominated the responses with regards to concern about the future of Belarusian. Those who claimed Russian as their native language represented the only category of respondents who expressed greater indifference than concern. Therefore, it appears that participants who identify with Belarusian on both practical and symbolic levels, i.e., responding to a questionnaire in Belarusian (practical), and indicating Belarusian as one’s native language (symbolic), stand a stronger chance of maintaining Belarusian than participants who demonstrate only symbolic attachment to the language.

6.3 Literature Read for Leisure

The works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Chekhov, Turgenev, and other well-known authors continue to hold a prominent place in family bookcases and in the curricula of lower, middle, and upper schools in countries of the former Soviet Union. This strong presence of Russian literature stems partly from a shift in language policy leading up to and immediately following World War II that made the study of Russian compulsory in all national schools and elevated it above other union languages. Lomtev’s (1949) thesis articulated this new change in policy: “The Russian language is the instrument of the most advanced culture—of socialist culture, and the most progressive science; it is the language of peace and progress. The Russian language is great, rich, and mighty. It is the instrument of the most advanced culture of the world.” The question arises of whether one’s personal library necessarily reflect one’s identity and, if so, what
does that say about the identities of the university-age students from Belarus who participated in this study?

Languages found in respondents’ personal libraries differ significantly from respondents’ stated native language—a finding that further invalidates the native language variable as an indicator of language utilization. Frequency data of participants’ responses to languages they use when reading for leisure clearly indicate a preference for Russian. A cross-tabulation of the aforementioned data according to languages reflected in participants’ personal library indicates that participants, whose library contains works in only one language or a majority of works in one language, generally adhere to the same language when reading for leisure.

6.4 Accessibility to Preferred Literature
The study also seeks to determine whether participants had access to published works in their preferred language. As Eastman (1983) writes, “People may want to maintain a language that they perhaps cannot keep for economic reasons. Thus, it is possible for language choice in a particular situation to be a matter of expedience rather than preference.” However, frequency data pertaining to this question indicate that the vast majority of respondents (89.4%) have access to works in their desired language. The overall findings of this study suggest that participants identify inwardly with Russian more than Belarusian from the practical standpoint of language usage when reading for leisure, regardless of the languages included in their personal library.

6.5 Language with Friends
Respondents’ language utilization with friends unquestionably favors Russian over Belarusian or mixed speech. Although the majority of participants self-reported that they were concerned about the future of Belarusian, the data indicate that responses from participants who reported to speak Belarusian with their friends significantly weigh in the affirmative. This finding underscores the awkward nature of speaking a language that carries little prestige and that often signifies political opposition when spoken in the public domain. Cross-tabulation of gender by language spoken with friends (see Figure 14) further corroborates previous analyses demonstrating that females show a greater proclivity for Russian than males, perhaps signifying greater
native language loyalty on the part of males and greater attention to pragmatism among females.

6.6 Language of Prospective Employment
Data for language prestige and knowledge of language for purposes of obtaining employment dovetail in this study. The marketability of Belarusian pales when compared with Russian, not to mention the many scientific and literary achievements associated with Russian for which Belarusian has no counterpart. Unsurprisingly, participants accord Russian greater prestige and importance than Belarusian, recognizing that Russian continues to control the levers of government and economics in the country. Referring to economics as perhaps the most influential force threatening the continued existence of endangered languages, Grenoble and Whaley (1998) write: “Not only is economic advancement a key motivation to relinquish a minority language in favor of the majority, but economics drives such things as the availability of published materials, schools, teachers, and, significantly, radio and television broadcasting. The realities of the modern day global economy place unprecedented financial pressures on minority languages.”

VII. Implications/Discussion
Overall, the findings suggest that, even among the minority of respondents who indicated Belarusian as their native language, Belarusian functions more as a “badge of ethnicity” (Crystal, 2000) than a practical language. A language environment of the aforementioned type characterizes a speech community described by Joshua Fishman (1967) as diglossia without bilingualism—diglossic in that Belarusian pertains primarily to certain ceremonial domains, whereas Russian is used virtually everywhere else. Circumstances as such, the future existence of Belarusian will depend on support from external sources in order to compensate for a pronounced absence of internal mobilization and maintenance of the language.

E. Sobolenko’s (1980) survey from the late 1970s in Belarus shows a similar disparity between native language and mother-tongue responses. Although the parameters of Sobolenko’s sample extend beyond university-age students living in urban centers, the data serve as a useful means of comparison by which general trends in the sociolinguistic situation of the Belarusian language can be ascertained. When compared with the findings in this study, one nonetheless
encounters a pronounced decline in Belarusian native language and mother-tongue responses along with a dramatic increase in Russian mother-tongue responses. According to Sobolenko, 73.0% of respondents indicated Belarusian as their native language almost thirty years ago, whereas only 30.7% indicated Belarusian as their native language in the present study—a difference of 42.3%. A total of 14.0% of respondents in Sobolenko’s survey indicated Belarusian as their mother tongue, whereas only 6.6% indicated Belarusian as their mother tongue in the present study. Conversely, Russian mother-tongue responses increased from 23.6% in Sobolenko’s survey to 69.0% in the current study. Finally, mixed Belarusian and Russian as a mother tongue declined from 59.7% in Sobolenko’s survey to 20.6% in this study. The 42.3% discrepancy between self-reported native language and mother-tongue responses suggests that, indeed, separation of roles exists between native language and mother tongue in contemporary Belarus. Accordingly, the Belarusian language, at least for the cohort under study, is seen to perform an ornamental or symbolic role in society whereas Russian serves a functional, everyday role.

Evidence of Belarusian playing a symbolic rather than a functional role becomes particularly apparent in participants’ self-reports regarding their concern about the future of Belarusian versus the language(s) they intend to speak with their children. If rhetoric were to translate into action in this instance, one would find a direct correlation between concern for the future of Belarusian and language spoken with children during their upbringing; however, the situation in Belarus presents an inverse relationship between the two questions. Do participants have concerns about the future of Belarusian—yes, but are they willing to take practical steps towards ensuring its sustained existence across generations—apparently not.

One finds in this conundrum a curious example of a culture straddling romantic nationalist ideals and everyday reality. According to Mechkovskaia (2003), such thinking largely explains why Belarusians in a 1996 survey replied “yes” to two seemingly conflicting questions: “Do you want Belarus to be an independent nation?” (64.6%) and “Do you want Belarus and Russia to unite and become one nation?” (62.5%). Individuals and communities will have to make sacrifices in order for Belarusian to acquire any functional status in society. Naturally, the question arises of whether any generation will accept that burden or whether Belarusian will remain the object of wishful thinking. To a
significant degree, the generation of university-age students in Belarus under examination in this study will play a decisive role in planning and implementing social, economic, educational, and governmental policies that penetrate key sectors of Belarusian society, not the least of which being the home. While such measures may reflect a top-down approach, they nonetheless stem from internal initiative rather than external pressure, which serves as a prerequisite for incremental and sustained development and change in Belarus’ linguistic landscape.

Considering current trends in Belarusian language usage, one might reasonably predict that Belarusian will drift into obsolescence over the course of the next 30 years, but is such a prediction probable? Will Belarus continue to yield its national language to market, political and/or social forces of Russification, or will the country preserve a formal, academic domain for the language? Alexander Schenker (1995) writes, “Human collectives have always strived to discover their origins. Held fast by linguistic, tribal, or religious bonds, societies are wont to test the strength of their union by examining its age and provenience.” Similarly, Dorian (1999) remarks, “The ancestral language connects people to its heritage in ways that there is simply no substitute for. (Awareness of this is what inspires so many third-generation grandchildren of immigrants to learn a language their grandparents deliberately abandoned).” Abandonment of Belarusian, to use Dorian’s description, has progressed to what some linguists would consider a point of no return—“return,” perhaps, in the sense of vernacular usage, but maybe not altogether language obsolescence.

The obsolescence of Belarusian would require far more than governmental efforts aimed at restricting Belarusian or even general ambivalence toward the language within the population at large, since the disappearance of Belarusian as a national language equates with the disappearance of a nation’s collective identity. Far more probable than language obsolescence seems the alternative of Belarusian joining the ranks of other endangered languages such as Irish that people use for academic purposes, but no longer speak in the home. Indeed, as Nettle and Romaine (2000) succinctly surmise in reference to Irish, “It is easier to sing songs, establish schools, and other organizations than to get families to speak a threatened language to their children.”

Crystal (2000) asserts that language and culture form indivisible components of one’s identity and that membership in a community presupposes knowledge of the respective language. Fishman (1996)
accords equal importance to language linking past and present
generations and dismisses modern attempts at reducing its significance.
Self-reported data from this study provide compelling evidence of such
indissoluble bonds that link language and identity—bonds that take on
particular significance when placed in the Eastern European context of
contemporary Belarus.

VIII. Directions for Future Research
This study focuses on students from institutions of higher education
living in three geographically and culturally distinct urban centers in
Belarus. Such an approach stems from the belief that individuals living in
urban centers who are pursuing advanced degrees will contribute to the
direction of future language policy and planning capable of impacting
entire communities and the nation at large more than individuals living
in rural regions of the country and/or lacking a rigorous academic
background. Future research investigating reported rural language
utilization coupled with an expanded array of statistical
analyses—regression analyses, in particular—will contribute to the
overall understanding of language usage and the attendant effects of
language policy and planning in Belarus.

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