

Being a Young Speaker of the Gagauz Language in Post-Soviet Context

Sovyet Sonrası Bağlamında Genç Bir Gagauzca Konuşuru Olmak

Kayhan İNAN *

Gülin Dağdeviren KIRMIZI **

Abstract

The concept of identity assumes great importance in the context of endangered languages. In this study, the identity perceptions of Gagauz adolescents were investigated using Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic approach. To this end, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with three adolescent Gagauz speakers who had distinctive profiles in terms of Gagauz identity. Bucholtz and Hall's indexicality principle, specifically the use of WE- and THEY- references, was taken into consideration in the analysis of interviews held with young Gagauz speakers. In the semi-structured interviews, the participants responded to specific questions that probed self-identification, the relationship between the Gagauz language and ethnicity, the future of Gagauz people and Gagauz language, and perceived linguistic (in)security when speaking Gagauz and Russian languages, as well as language choice at school. The findings show that the participants have different profiles and use various indexical references and linguistic strategies regarding group membership. The influence of Russia and the Russian language on Gagauz identity is salient in social life, bureaucracy, and politics. As a result, the strong identification with ethnic identity and perception of Gagauz identity does not help maintain the Gagauz language in Gagauzia.

* Doç. Dr., Amasya Üniversitesi
Eğitim Fakültesi Türkçe Eğitimi
Bölümü

kayhan.inan@amasya.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-7438-0742

Amasya / TÜRKİYE

** Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Başkent
Üniversitesi İngilizce

Öğretmenliği Programı

gdagdeviren@baskent.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-4675-1040

Ankara / TÜRKİYE

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Amasya
University, Faculty of Education,

Department of

Turkish Education

kayhan.inan@amasya.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-7438-0742

Amasya / TÜRKİYE

** Assist. Prof. Dr., Başkent
University English

Teacher Education Program

gdagdeviren@baskent.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-4675-1040

Ankara / TÜRKİYE

Başvuru/Submitted: 25/01/2023

Kabul/Accepted: 12/06/2023

Keywords:

Gagauz Language, Russian Language, Young Speakers, Identity, Endangered Languages.

Öz

Kimlik kavramı, tehlike altındaki diller bağlamında büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmada Gagauz gençlerin kimlik algıları Bucholtz and Hall (2005) tarafından geliştirilen sosyokültürel dil bilimsel yaklaşım kullanılarak araştırılmıştır. Bu amaçla, Gagauz kimliği açısından farklı profillere sahip üç Gagauz genç ile yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Genç Gagauz konuşmacılarla gerçekleştirilen görüşmeler, Bucholtz ve Hall'un dizinsellik ilkesi çerçevesinde özellikle BİZ ve ONLAR referanslarının kullanımı bakımından analiz edilmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme kapsamında katılımcılar, Gagauz dili ve etnik köken arasındaki ilişkiyi, Gagauz halkının ve Gagauz dilinin geleceğini, okuldaki dil seçimlerinde Gagauz ve Rus dillerine yönelik dil bilimsel güven algılarını betimlemeye ilişkin soruları yanıtlamıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, katılımcıların konu ile ilgili farklı profiller çizdiğini göstermiştir. Grup üyeliği ve kimlik

bağlamında görüşmecilerin çeşitli dizinsel referanslar ve dil bilimsel stratejiler kullandıkları görülmektedir. Rusya'nın ve Rus dilinin Gagauz kimliği üzerindeki etkisi sosyal hayatta, bürokraside ve siyasette belirgindir. Sonuçlar, Gagauz kimliğinin güçlü bir şekilde etnik kimlikle özdeşleştirilmesinin ve Gagauz kimliği algısının, Gagauz dilinin Gagauz Yeri'nde sürdürülmesine yardımcı olmadığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Gagauzca, Rusça, Genç Konuşurlar, Kimlik, Tehlike Altındaki Diller.

Makale Bilgileri

- Atıf:** İnan, K. & D. Kırmızı, G. (2023). Being a Young Speaker of the Gagauz Language in Post-Soviet Context. *Selçuk Türkiyat*, (60): 379-397.
- Etik Kurul Kararı:** Etik Kurul Kararından muaftır.
- Katılımcı Rızası:** Katılımı yok.
- Mali Destek:** Çalışma için herhangi bir kurum ve projeden mali destek alınmamıştır.
- Çıkar Çatışması:** Çalışmada kişiler ve kurumlar arası çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
- Telif Hakları:** Çalışmada kullanılan görsellerle ilgili telif hakkı sahiplerinden gerekli izinler alınmıştır.
- Değerlendirme:** İki dış hakem / Çift taraflı körleme.
- Benzerlik Taraması:** Yapıldı – iThenticate.
- Etik Beyan:** sutad@selcuk.edu.tr, selcukturkiyat@gmail.com
- Lisans:** Bu eser Creative Commons Atıf-GayriTicari 4.0 Uluslararası (CC BY-NC 4.0) lisansı ile lisanslanmıştır.

Article Information

- Ethics Committee Approval:** It is exempt from the Ethics Committee Approval.
- Informed Consent:** No participants.
- Financial Support:** The study received no financial support from any institution or project.
- Conflict of Interest:** No conflict of interest.
- Copyrights:** The required permissions have been obtained from the copyright holders for the images and photos used in the study.
- Assessment:** Two external referees / Double blind.
- Similarity Screening:** Checked – iThenticate.
- Ethical Statement:** selcukturkiyat@gmail.com, fatihnumankb@selcuk.edu.tr
- License:** Content of this Journal is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

Introduction

Identity

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the relationship between identity and language so far. Two main views to identity, namely essentialist and post-structuralist approaches, discuss identity from different perspectives. The former, essentialism, defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, p. 374) as the theoretical position that maintains that those who occupy an identity category are both fundamentally similar to one another and fundamentally different from members of other groups. Attributes such as race, gender and language are considered the essences of identity. To exemplify, ethnic identity, one of the realizations of essentialist position, prioritizes “shared culture” of the individuals “with a shared history and ancestry” (Hall, 1996, p. 393).

Overgeneralization of the attributes of the individuals to the category and solid categorization which do not allow modification are some of the main disadvantages of the essentialist approach (Phillips, 2010). As opposed to static and solid nature of the essentialist approach, the latter position namely post-structuralist approach, takes identity as a changing and transforming concept.

Emphasizing the “process of identification”, Hall and Du Gay (1996, p. 2) defined it as a process never completed and logged in contingency. In post-structuralist perspective, identity is constructed through discourses (Foucault, 2002). According to Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) to exemplify, performing speech acts can be considered as the acts of identity. Similarly, stylistic practices contribute to the identity construction.

Speakers have social identities when they categorize themselves as the in-group or out group members of the certain social categories (Stets, 2006). This results in uniformity among group members (Oakes & Haslam, 1994). As a part of social identity, ethnic identity can be defined as “that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Language is an important factor in identifying the boundaries of the groups (Giles & Coupland & Coupland, 1991). Especially, in the case of language endangerment identity perceptions of the speakers has a vital role.

Socio-Cultural Linguistic Approach to Identity

A large and growing body of literature has investigated identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 596) adopted sociocultural stance and proposed a framework to explore identity. Interaction, in this perspective, plays an important role as identity is the social positioning of self and other. In other words, conversation is one of the domains where identity is shaped and transformed. Taking the interaction as the basis for analysing social meaning in identity research, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose five principles: *emergence, positionality, partialness, relationality and indexicality*.

The emergence principle, according to Bucholtz and Hall (2010) was inspired from the concept of emergence in linguistic anthropology and interactional linguistics. It inherits

a challenging nature as identity is seen as an emerging construct in social interaction. *Positionality principle*, in contrast to previous research which takes macro identity categories such as age, gender and social class into consideration, emphasizes the ethnography as a tool to understand local and micro identity categories which are more specific and dynamic in social interaction. As identity was seen by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) as emergent and relational, it can also be considered partial.

The principle of partialness, which has also been studied in cultural anthropology and feminist theory, challenges the internally coherent conceptualization of social life and asserts that identity is partial given that it is produced contextually. Moreover, the role of agency in identity production was emphasized in social interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 606). *The principle of relationality* asserts that identities are not autonomous and independent, but intersubjective. To this end, Bucholtz and Hall (2004b, p. 498) offer three pairs of relations which are adequation and distinction, authentication and deneutralization, and authorization and illegitimation. In the first of these, adequation and distinction, Bucholtz and Hall (2004a) emphasize sameness and difference as the phenomenological concepts in social interaction. The second set of tactics is authentication and deneutralization. Here, it is important to bear in mind that the term authentication instead of authenticity was chosen intentionally as the latter is related to essentialist account. In authentication, language plays a crucial role in identity formation, especially in nationalistic level. On the other hand, the tactic of deneutralization refers to divergences from realness in the formation of identity. The last of these pairs is authorization and illegitimation. Authorization manifest itself in social interaction through institutionalized power and ideology. In contrast to authorization, in the tactic of illegitimation, dismissing and perpetuating identities through local or translocal structures can be seen (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a).

Indexicality, one of the principles of sociocultural framework, dates back to Silverstein (1995). Indices were defined as signs where the occurrence of the sign vehicle token bears a connection of understood spatio-temporal contiguity to the occurrence of the entity signalled (Silverstein, 1995, p. 199). Ochs (1992) who studied language features indexing gender, emphasized the indirect relationship between linguistic structures and social categories. Indexicality plays an important role in the interpretation of social meaning and social interaction. According to Blommaert (2005, p. 11-12) indexical meaning is what anchors language usage firmly into social and cultural patterns as indexical sign evokes the inference of social and cultural qualities.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 594) define it as a mechanism facilitated in the construction of identity and categorize strategies of indexicality into four. The first of these is overt introduction of referential identity categories and labels. Here, cultural beliefs and norms play a crucial role in the use of these linguistic structures which can be adjectives and modifiers. Unlike overt and direct nature of the first category, the second one includes implicatures and presuppositions. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), especially in insecure contexts where participants position their identities according to the dynamics of the group, indirect strategies are preferred by speakers. Additionally, contextual information is required to analyse positions of identity.

Stance, the third strategy of indexicality, can be defined as the participant orientation in social interaction. In this perspective, stance is considered to have dynamic social boundaries and relational statuses. Therefore, as was suggested by Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 596) through micro-level linguistic structures interactional stances can be associated to certain social categories in the construction of identity. The last strategy of indexicality is the certain linguistic structures and systems which are signalling personas and groups. Especially the choice of a certain language and dialect is said to be able construct a speaker identity in social interaction. In this study, the use of pronouns showing in- and out-groupness was investigated.

Gagauz Language and Gagauzia ATU

Gagauz language is classified as a member of Oghuz Turkish, which forms the western branch of Turkish. Linguistically, it is considered one of the Balkan dialects of Turkish (Doerfer, 1959). Speakers of the Gagauz language live in the south of the Republic of Moldova and the Izmail region of Odessa (Odesa), some parts of Ukraine, Deli Orman in Bulgaria, coastal and inland regions of Bulgaria, some regions in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now North Macedonia), and Turkey (Moseley, 2020). However, only in the Republic of Moldova is Gagauz language constitutionally recognized.

As a result of interaction with Slavic languages for centuries, Gagauz differed from Turkish in terms of some typological features (Johanson, 2020). Although Gagauz language is basically similar to Turkish phonetically and morphologically, it has copied the syntactic features of Russian and Bulgarian. Lexically, due to close interaction with Gagauz language has borrowed words from Russian, as well as from Bulgarian and Romanian in the last century. In recent years, the words and expressions used in standard Turkish have started to appear in Gagauz language due to the follow-up of Turkish media in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and travels to Turkey (Menz, 2003). Before 1996 when Latin-based alphabet for Gagauz language was agreed upon, Cyrillic alphabet and Latin alphabet with Romanian conventions were used (Menz, 2013).

At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly 20 theories were propounded on the origin of the Gagauz (Guboglo, 2018). One of the arguments attributes the origin of the Gagauz to the Kipchak Turkic tribes, such as the Cumans and the Pechenegs, who migrated to the region from the north of the Black Sea. It is thought that the Oghuzs who used the same route in the 11th century settled the region as well. These Turkic tribes were said to have converted to Christianity (Güngör & Argunşah, 1991; Menz, 2013). Another theory suggests that the Muslim Seljuk Turks, who had settled into the region of Dobruja earlier in the 13th and converted to Christianity over time. It is thought that the Seljuk Turks may have encountered and mixed with the Christian Turks who settled earlier in Bulgaria and Dobruja (Demir, 2011). There are also some non-Turkic theories which claim that the Gagauz are Turkified Bulgarian and Greek community (Menz, 2013). Gagauz people lived mostly in the south of the Danube until the 18th century. After the Russo-Turkish wars a large Gagauz population immigrated to Budjak with Bulgarians when the region was ceded to Russian Empire (Menz, 2007).

The Gagauz lived as a small community in the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Romania and the Soviet Union until Moldova declared its independence and the Gagauz were granted autonomy with the establishment of Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Moldova in 1994. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (2020) the resident population as of 1 January 2019 of Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia was 161,676. When the place of residence of this population is taken into consideration, 65,942 people were living in urban locations, and 95,734 people were residing in rural places. According to statistics, young people under 16 years of age made up 18% of the total population of Gagauzia ATU.

Although there has been sociolinguistic (Bodean-Vozian & Soltan, 2014; Dağdeviren-Kırmızı, 2020), sociological (Keough, 2006; Sağlam & Adıgüzel, 2001), educational (Eren, 2021; Küçükler & Curdoglu, 2021) and linguistic research on Gagauz language (Menz, 2006; Özkan, 2016), no research has been found that surveyed WE and THEY referring in- and out-groupness in the context of Gagauz adolescents. To this end, the following research questions were posed.

- How do adolescent Gagauz speakers describe Gagauz identity?
- What do the use of personal pronouns show about the adolescent Gagauz speakers' categorization of group membership?
- How do the adolescent Gagauz speakers' categorization of group membership relate to the endangerment of Gagauz language?

The Study

Theoretical framework adopted in the current study is the principle of Indexicality, which is a component of the sociocultural framework developed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). The methodological approach taken is a qualitative case study, with data collected from three adolescent Gagauz speakers. Semi-structured interviews inquired into how adolescent Gagauz speakers categorize themselves as the members of social groups. Each participant was asked about the language of the interview, and they chose Gagauz (n=1) and Russian (n=2) languages. The participation to the study was voluntary. They were not paid or did not receive any credits.

Participants

As mentioned above, the data was collected from three adolescent Gagauz speakers residing in Gagauzia, ATU, Moldova. All the participants declared themselves as ethnically Gagauz and bilinguals in Gagauz and Russian languages. They also reported that they were born in Gagauzia and had never lived abroad before.

Participants are attending high schools in Komrat and Kongaz. The first of the participants, Maria is 15 years old female. She is 8th grade student of a high school in Komrat of which medium of instruction is Russian. The second participant is Natalia who is a 14 years old female attending the 8th class at the same high school as Maria. The third participant, Igor, an 18-year-old male speaker, is attending 11th grade of a high school in Kongaz. All participants have 4-hour Gagauz Language course a week at school. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used.

Data Analysis

Bucholtz and Hall's (2005, p. 594) indexicality principle, which includes "overt mention of identity categories and labels" and "the use of linguistic structures and systems" that are ideologically associated with specific personas and group" as processes signalling identity, was used to investigate adolescent Gagauz speakers' identity emerging from social interaction as the speakers of an endangered language. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) asserted that labelling along with other linguistic elaborations and qualifications are constructing identity in texts. Similarly, the use of personal pronouns is important to observe the social relations in texts. To this end, transcribed recordings with Maria (recording 1), Natalia (recording 2), Igor (recording 3) were carefully analysed to investigate personal pronouns as the linguistic forms indexing identity in Gagauz context. The variants of WE and THEY references were also taken into consideration.

In the semi-structured interview, the participants responded certain questions that probed self-identification, the relationship between Gagauz language and ethnicity, the future of Gagauz people and Gagauz language, perceived linguistic (in)security while speaking Gagauz and Russian languages and language choice at school. In the analysis, first pronominal references were identified. As mentioned below, apart from pronouns, their variants were also taken into consideration. Therefore, references with genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental and prepositional inflections were identified. Then, the pronouns which refer to entities except from speakers which share common sociocultural features were omitted. For example, THEY (они) in the sentence 'Да, они похожи' (line 61, recording 1) refers to Gagauz and Turkish languages.

In the second stage, personal references which have collective index, were categorized into referents such as Gagauz people, Russian people, and other. As a further step, personal pronouns were grouped in terms of exact referents for each group. To exemplify, WE in the sentence 'критики мы не слышим' (line 97, recording 2) was used to refer Gagauz people but specifically Gagauz adolescents. Apart from WE, THEY and their variants, the participants used third person singular male and female pronouns to refer Gagauz and Russian people. Although this use cannot be included, WE and THEY distinction structurally, inclusiveness and exclusiveness to a sociocultural group is salient. Therefore, third person singular pronouns referring groups of people were also analysed.

Findings

Recording 1: Maria

The first participant, Maria, had a characteristic use of WE and THEY reference. Overall analysis showed that she uses THEY and its variants more frequently than WE and its variants (see Table 1). Therefore, there is not a very sharp distinction between WE/THEY uses and sociocultural group membership to Gagauz and other ethnic groups.

Table 1. Examples of group reference in Recording

Line	Example	Referents
18	они кочевали <i>they wandered</i>	Ancestors of Gagauz people
6	Если бы сюда не пришел наш народ, <i>If our people had not come here,</i>	
105	потому что они не понимают, но могут на русском объяснить. <i>as they do not understand, but they can explain in Russian.</i>	Gagauz children who cannot speak Gagauz language

When Maria was asked how to define herself ethnically, she stated that she was Gagauz. While she was commenting on the ancestors of Gagauz people, who migrated to the land populated by the Gagauz people today, she used WE as an indicator of group membership. To exemplify, she said “потому что наш народ сделал все ради того,” (because our people did everything for; line 8-9, recording 1) while she was talking about the efforts of Gagauz people to make land habitable. However, talking about the same issue she said “из-за того, что им тут дали землю, они были очень благодарны” (as they were given land here, they were very grateful; line 19, recording 1) to refer Gagauz ancestors again but used THEY instead.

Maria’s use of WE reference was very consistent and, in all examples, she referred to Gagauz people. To exemplify, she used WE while commenting on the relationship between language and identity. In example 1, she used WE to refer Gagauz people and saliently considered herself as a member of the group.

Example 1:

111 потому что мы находимся в Гагаузской Автономии, и мы должны знать гагаузский,
as we are in the Gagauz Autonomy, we must know Gagauz

As mentioned above, although Maria’s use of WE showed inclusion to Gagauz people clearly, she also used THEY-group reference to refer to different Gagauz sociocultural groups. In the most frequent examples, THEY was used to refer Gagauz adolescents and children. In example 2 she was asked whether she watched GRT (Gagauziya Radio Televizionu) at home, she said she watched it rarely and used THEY in distinctive way.

Example 2:

159 хотя бы, нынешнее поколение начинали смотреть
at least the current generation started watching (it)
160 и
and
161 чтобы начинали привыкать,

(they) got used to (it)

162 потому что **они** же здесь проживают
because **they** live here.

As can be seen (line 162, recording 1), Maria differentiated the THEY-group reference from WE-group reference while referring to Gagauz adolescents. Although she is a Gagauz adolescent while she was referring to the other Gagauz adolescents watching GRT, she excluded herself and used a deductive reasoning. Maria noticeably associated watching local GRT to the Gagauz citizenship, and positioned herself outside this group.

Maria's other THEY-groups apart from Gagauz people covered other sociocultural groups such as Moldovans and other ethnic groups. When she was asked whether Gagauz is an endangered language, she said that it is an endangered language as other people which presumably referred to ethnic groups other than Gagauz people, did not know Gagauz people and could not speak Gagauz language. She commented that "**они** задумываются если существует ли такой народ" (**they** wonder if there is such a people; line 254, recording 1). In this example, there is a clear boundary between her Gagauz identity and other ethnic identities living in the same territory.

Recording 2: Natalia

Natalia labelled herself as a Gagauz. When asked how to describe Gagauz people, a remarkable use WE-group categorization is seen. The variants of WE-group reference we mainly used to refer Gagauz people and Gagauz adolescents as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of group reference in Recording

Line	Example	Referents
36	и его нужно изучать, потому что <i>and it needs to be studied because</i>	
37	это наша история, <i>this is our history</i>	Gagauz people
38	наше богатство, <i>our wealth</i>	
70	то есть, если мы не покажем другому народу, <i>that is, if we do not show other people</i>	
71	что <i>that</i>	Gagauz people
72	мы дружные <i>we are friendly</i>	

Natalia had a very consistent way of using WE-group reference to refer Gagauz people as a sociocultural group. In her descriptions of Gagauz ethnic identity, certain themes were observed. Natalia described Gagauz identity through two primary

orientations: livelihood and stereotypical characteristics of the community. Livelihood, one of these orientations, is very salient in self-descriptions (see Table 3). Natalia also associated the Gagauz people to the agricultural occupations. Moreover, as can be seen below, a sharp distinction between pastoral versus white collar stereotypes of occupations were also made. In line 9 (recording 2) WE-group reference was used to refer Gagauz people who are mostly working at jobs which require physical strength. Stereotypical characteristics were the second orientation in the description of the Gagauz identity. In the interview this came up with the use of WE-group reference which denoted Gagauz people as hardworking ones. Both of the orientations of Natalia's positioning shows inclusion to the sociocultural group and show strong evidence for membership.

Example 3

9 В связи с тем, что у нас мало рабочих мест,

Due to the fact that we have few jobs

10 именно работать врачом в поликлинике где-то,

to work as a doctor in a polyclinic somewhere

11 люди, наоборот, больше работают, даже если опираться на те самые стройки,

people, on the contrary, work more, even if you rely on the very construction sites

12 там же нужна физическая сила.

physical strength is needed.

13 Люди очень трудолюбивы. И еще есть у нас такое выражение, как:

people are very hardworking. And we also have an expression like this:

14 Гагаузы – гордый народ.

The Gagauz are a proud people.

Natalia's second sociocultural WE-group covered Gagauz adolescents who were studying at high school. While she was commenting on the future of Gagauz language as an endangered one, she used WE-group reference. In this example, it is clearly seen that she perceived adolescent high school group as a part of Gagauz identity. The use of наших (our) referred to Gagauz high school students only a few of whom could speak Gagauz language (line 143, recording 2). It is seen that Natalia includes herself to this sociocultural group which has three characteristics: being a Gagauz and adolescent with a low or no proficiency in Gagauz language.

Example 4

143 Если брать наших первоклассников,

If we take our first graders

144 там знают только единицы гагаузский язык,

only a few know the Gagauz language

145 а сейчас, наоборот, дети и люди стараются больше на гагаузском разговаривать

and now, on the contrary, children and people are trying to speak Gagauz more

Recently, there have been many attempts to revive Gagauz language and culture in Gagauzia ATU. These mainly include commemorative and awareness events, including cultural days/festivals, knowledge competitions, poem competitions, art exhibitions and commemoration days. Natalia was asked whether she participated in these events. She commented that previously she was participating these events and performing songs, dances, etc. Talking about this issue, she used WE-group reference (line 317, line 323; recording 2) to refer Gagauz adolescents who took part in those events and she showed her membership to the sociocultural group.

Example 5

317 **Мы** готовили разные

We prepared various

318 стихи,

poems,

319 песни,

songs,

320 именно на гагаузском языке,

exactly on the Gagauz language,

321 традиционные танцы,

traditional dances

322 и еще,

and also

323 все время пели гимн, то есть у нас каждый раз на каждом мероприятии

we sang the anthem all the time, that is, we have every time at every event

324 включали гимн гагаузский.

we included Gagauz anthem

Apart from these, Natalia used THEY-group reference for Gagauz people. In this example, when she was asked about the future of Gagauz language, she said “они вымрут в скором времени (**they** will die out soon; line 94, recording 2) and used THEY to refer Gagauz elderly to emphasize the generation gap between them in the context of an endangered language.

Recording 3: Igor

While identifying himself as a Gagauz, he mentioned some characteristics of being Gagauz. First, he used third person singular *o* (s/he) (line 3, recording 3) to refer a Gagauz and described them as active and hardworking one. In his second mention, he used *bir kişi* (someone) (line 8, recording 3) to refer a typical Gagauz and described him/her as a passionate one. Commenting on the relationship between Gagauz language and identity, Igor said mindset is as important as language in the formation of Gagauz identity.

Apart from these Igor had distinctive linguistic features during the conversation. He chose speaking Gagauz language but showed many patterns of codeswitching. His alternation between Gagauz and Russian languages occurred in inter-sentential and intra-sentential positions. Some examples from his WE-group reference can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of group reference in Recording

Line	Example	Referents
204	Biz sayım Gagauz dilinde <i>We, to exemplify, (speak) Gagauz language</i>	
205	Yok <i>(it is) not</i>	
206	Yok ölä not	
207	Rus dilindä <i>in Russian language</i>	Gagauz family
208	Hepsicii <i>All of them</i>	
209	Sayım sayım speak speak (repetition)	
210	Gagauz dilindä <i>in Gagauz language</i>	
361	Да <i>Yes (Well)</i>	
362	Sayım öz dilimizdä <i>(we) speak in (our) native language</i>	
362	они просто только на гагаузком <i>they only in Gagauz language</i>	
364	То Нам удобно <i>which is easy for us</i>	Gagauz adolescents
365	Ama biliim именно поколение <i>But I know if we take younger generations into (consideration)</i>	
366	Ruşçasını <i>Russian</i>	
367	популярные среди молодежи <i>(is) popular among young people</i>	

As can be seen above, his use of WE typically referred to Gagauz people. While he was talking about the use of Gagauz language, he used WE to refer his Gagauz family (line 204, recording 3). Similarly, in another reference, the use WE showed Gagauz adolescents (line 364, recording 3). In this example, Igor used WE reference to emphasize the distinction between WE group he belongs to (he and his Gagauz speaking peers) and THEY (younger generation).

One of the typical WE reference Igor used is the ones which is related to the place. In many examples, he used WE and HERE together. This type of use shows the association of Gagauz community and the Gagauzia ATU. In other words, the land can be considered as a part of Gagauz identity. A similar use is found in Example 6.

Example 6

133 Именно если

If

134 laf edärsäk

we speak (about) (Gagauz language)

135 Гагаузский гелер

Gagauz language (it is Gagauz language)

136 Rus

Russian

137 olanca уармаа demeli ikinci

(Russian) is the second

138 национальный

national (language)

139 ilk

the first

140 de

(one)

141 **bizim** bu yerdä

(in) our (this) place

142 Gagauz yerdä lääzım olsun

Gagauz language is required

143 Gagauz

Gagauz (repetiton)

144 Gagauz dili

Gagauz language

145 Да

Yes (as a discourse marker)

As mentioned before, the inclusion of land in the concept of identity is highly prevalent in Igor's speech. When talking about the future of Gagauz, he used possessive use for WE (*bizim*) (line 141, recording 3) to refer Gagauz people and co-occurs with a determiner *this* (*bu*) and a noun *place* (*yer*). Igor's examples show how Gagauz identity intersect with Gagauzia, ATU. Finally, in the example given below WE group-reference was used to refer Gagauz youth. Here Igor contrasted his childhood and today's children in terms of the use of Gagauz language. By doing so,

he excluded himself from the ones who were speaking Gagauz language in their childhood.

Example 7

261 **Biz** dä

We also

262 Çıkardık

used to go out

263 Sokaa uşaklarlan oynamaa

to play with children

264 Hepsicii

All of them

265 Sayım Gagauzça

(used to speak) Gagauz language

266 Yokumca даже Rusçasını

even Russian

267 Laf işidmemiz

We (did not) hear

268 Hepsicik Gagauzça

All (was) Gagauz

As can be seen above, three participants have different characteristics on the basis of the use of WE and THEY group references to refer themselves as Gagauz people. Although in most of the cases WE was used to refer Gagauz people, adolescents, families, etc., sometimes participants used THEY, which signals exclusion from the group.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is important that Gagauz identity be discussed in post-Soviet context. Soviet identity was an inclusive identity for the diverse ethnic groups living within the borders of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Collective identity was defined by Landry, Allard, and Deveau as ‘the image that the community, has of itself as a historical and legitimate group’ and constructed in the public discourses such as media and landscape (Ehala, 2015). *Sovetskiy narod* (soviet people) with a shared identity and free of national characteristics was aimed for the USSR (Suny, 2012, p. 24). The dissolution of Soviet Union played an important role in the transformation of the identities of ethnic groups. Soviet nostalgia, observed in many post-Soviet contexts, is considered a characteristic of transitional phase from Soviet to national culture (Kennedy, 2002; Vogt, 2005). In this context, Gagauz people revived their ethnic identity with the declaration of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia in 1994 (King, 2000).

In this study identity perceptions of Gagauz adolescents were investigated using Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) socio-cultural linguistic approach. To this end, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with three adolescent Gagauz speakers. Participants had three distinctive profiles in terms of Gagauz identity. The first research question in this study sought to examine the self-descriptions and the second question investigated the linguistic tools used in the expression of Gagauz identity. It is seen that the discourse of Gagauz ethnicity is closely associated to Gagauz history. All participants described them as Gagauz speakers, however the way they describe Gagauz people, and their characteristics vary in terms of the use of WE and THEY group references. Maria, to exemplify, has a fluctuating profile. Throughout the interview, Gagauz people were mentioned using WE, THEY and their variants which mostly didn't show a consistency. Her WE uses directly refer to Gagauz people but she also uses THEY to refer Gagauz people. It is seen that her group membership manifests itself differently. In some those examples, i.e., in the one she used THEY to refer Gagauz adolescents, she expresses Gagauz identity as if she was an outsider. Gagauz identity after the collapse of Soviet Union was reshaped in post-Soviet context. As Sağlam and Adıgüzel stated ...institutions... restructured were built around not Gagauz, but Soviet language-cultural heritage (2021, p. 281), therefore resulted in heavy influence on Gagauz identity. Thus, especially for most of the younger generations, the ones who did not live under Soviet regime, consider Russian identity as an inseparable part of being Gagauz.

In contrast to Maria's profile, Natalia demonstrated a consistent profile using WE-group reference for Gagauz people. As can be seen in Natalia'a interview, the Gagauz people developed a positive self-concept. She perceived Gagauz identity related to livelihood and stereotypical characteristics. Her strong inclusion can also be seen in self-descriptions of Gagauz society. Her uses of *наша история* (our history), *наше богатство* (our wealth). However, when Natalia talking about the language, her unique THEY reference was for elderly. In Gagauz context intergenerational differences in terms of multilingualism is very salient. Although rare, monolingualism in Gagauz elderly can be observed in the society (Menz, 2003). There are also attitudinal differences towards the use of Gagauz and Russian languages between younger and older generations (Dağdeviren-Kırmızı, 2020). Natalia showed this distinction between the age groups using THEY reference and positioned herself outside the group. As for people over 50, it mostly refers to a search to restore financial stability during Soviet Regime. On the other hand, for younger generations who have not experienced Soviet lifestyle, it is Russia that offers economic, educational and social opportunities (Keough, 2006). Therefore, the relationship between language choice and socio-economical/-historical factors is not surprising. Affinity to Russia can be observed in many domains such as politics, education, and linguistic landscape.

Igor, similar to Natalia, has a consistent use of WE to refer Gagauz people; however, the use of frequent inter-sentential and intra-sentential codeswitching patterns differ from the others. Igor's THEY-group reference covers many groups such as Gagauz adolescents and families. Additionally, in some cases his group

identification was manifested with his emphasis on Gagauzia. As for Gagauzian context, King (1997, p. 741) emphasized that before the dissolution of the Soviet regime, the Gagauz people's declaration of Gagauz language as L1 showed the attachment to their ethnic identity. According to Menz (2007, p. 129) as opposed to the other Gagauz communities such as the ones in Bulgaria, language is the most important criterion for Gagauzness for the ones living in Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Moldova. Emphasizing the transformation in the Gagauz identity in post-Soviet period, Sağlam and Adıgüzel (2021, p. 293) claim that although the emphasis on Turkic lineage became salient in the interviews, the Gagauz identity is transmitted in a limited way in daily life practices. Although emphasis on Turkic linkage was not observed in the current study, along with the use of Gagauz language a transformation in Gagauz identity can be seen.

The third question in this study investigated the perception of identity in the context of language endangerment. Prior studies observed inconsistent findings on the perception of language and identity. To exemplify, the degree of identification with the ethnic group and the language maintenance may not be positively correlated as Fishman (1991) stated. Similarly, as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) emphasized, ethnic identity perceptions of speakers can be observed even in the case of language death. In some cases, strong identification with the ethnic identity does not contribute to the transmission of the minority language. Dağdeviren-Kırmızı's (2020) research corroborates the findings of a great deal of the previous work in term of intergenerational transmission. When it comes to the functionality of the Russian and Gagauz languages, as Dorian states ancestral language can be replaced by a more functional language in this case. Russian language which is "up-wardly socially mobile" in Soviet regime (Tishkov, 1997, p. 75), still plays an important role in intercultural interaction and daily life in Gagauz context. This is also supported by Sallabank (2013) who asserts that languages at risk may be associated with traditional culture instead of being fully functional in daily communication.

As Tishkov (1997) stated, ethnic identities have a fluctuating nature which refers to being more or less salient in terms of socio-political dynamics. In the case of Gagauz, especially after the dissolution of USSR, it become salient. However, it is evident that Gagauz identity is interacting with Russian identity. Despite the emphasis on Gagauz identity, the influence of Russia and Russian language is salient in social life, bureaucracy, and politics. As a result, the strong identification with ethnic identity and perception of Gagauz identity do not help the maintenance of Gagauz language in Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Moldova.

Makaledeki Yazar Katkılarının Yüzde ile Gösterilmesi
(Showing Author Contributions in the Article as Percent)

	1. Sorumlu Yazar (Responsible Author)	2. Katkı Sunan Yazar (Contributer Author)	3. Katkı Sunan Yazar (Contributer Author)	4. Katkı Sunan Yazar (Contributer Author)
Çalışmanın Tasarlanması: (Conceiving the Study)	%50	%50		
Veri Toplanması: (Data Collection)	%60	%40		
Veri Analizi: (Data Analysis)	-	-	-	-
Makalenin Yazımı: (Writingup)	%20	%80		5
Makale Gönderimi ve Revizyonu: (Submission and Revision)	%60	%40		
Çıkar Çatışması: (Competing Interests)	Yazarlar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan ederler. The authors declare that they have no competing			

* Not(e): Belgenin imzalı asıl nüshası dergi süreç dosyalarında mevcuttur.

(The signed original copy of the document is available in the journal process files archive)

References

- Bankston, C. L. & Henry, J. M. (1998). The silence of the gators: Cajun ethnicity and intergenerational transmission of Louisiana French. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 19(1), 1-23. doi: 10.1080/01434639808666339
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse: A critical introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511610295
- Bodean-Vozian, O. & Soltan, A. (2014). Language policy dimensions for social cohesion in Moldova: The case of Gagauz autonomy. *Sustainable Multilingualism*, 4, 25-45. doi: 10.7220/2335-2027.4.2
- Bucholtz, M. & Hall, K. (2004a). Language and identity. (A. Duranti, ed.). *A companion to linguistic anthropology* (pp. 369-385). Malden: Basil Blackwell.
- Bucholtz, M. & Hall, K. (2004b). Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research. *Language in Society*, 33(4), 469-515. doi: 10.1017/S0047404504334020
- Bucholtz, M. & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7, 585-614. doi: 10.1177/1461445605054407
- Bucholtz, M. & Hall, K. (2010). Locating identity in language. (C. Llamas & D. Watt, ed.). *Language and identities* (pp. 18-28). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dağdeviren-Kırmızı, G. (2020). Emotional and functional speaker attitudes towards Gagauz as an endangered language. *Bilig*, 93, 203-222. doi: 10.12995/bilig.9309
- Demir, N. (2011). Saltık-nâme ve Selçuk-nâme ışığında Gagauz Türkleri. *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken*, 3(2), 5-19. <https://dieweltdertuerken.org/index.php/ZfWT/article/view/244>
- Doerfer, G. (1959). Das Gagausische. (J. Deny, K. Grønbech, & L. Bazin, ed.). *Philologiae Turcicae fundamenta* (pp. 260-271). Wiesbaden: Aquis Mattiacis Apud Franciscum Steiner.
- Dorian, N. (1999). Linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork. (J. Fishman, ed.). *Handbook of language and ethnic identity* (pp. 25-41). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ehala, M. (2015). Blurring of collective identities in the post-Soviet space. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 9(2-3), 173-190. doi: 10.1558/sols.v9i2.26734
- Eren, E. (2021). Language and education policies based on national/plurilingual identity in autonomous republics: A case study of the Gagauzia autonomous region. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 4(3), 192-199. doi: 10.31014/aior.1993.04.03.330
- Fishman, J. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The archaeology of knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Giles, H., Coupland, N., & Coupland, J. (1991). Accommodation theory: Communication, context, and consequence. (H. Giles, J. Coupland, & N. Coupland, ed.). *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics* (pp. 1-68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511663673.001
- Guboglo, M. N. (2018). Gagauzların etnik aidiyeti. (B. Hünerli, çev.). *TÜRÜK Uluslararası Dil Edebiyat ve Halk Bilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(12), 67-78. (Original work published 1967) <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/turuk/issue/42737/517522>
- Güngör, H. & Arğunşah, M. (1991). *Gagauz Türkleri*. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları.
- Hall, S. & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage. doi: 10.4135/9781446221907
- Johanson, L. (2020). Turkic language contacts. (R. Hickey, ed.). *The handbook of language contact* (pp. 652-672). Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell. doi: 10.1002/9781444318159
- Kennedy, M. (2002). *Cultural formations of post-communism: emancipation, transition, nation, and war*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Keough, L. (2006). Globalizing postsocialism: Mobile mothers and neoliberalism on the margins of Europe. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 79(3), 431-461. <https://jstor.org/stable/4150873>
- King, C. (1997). Minorities policy in the post-Soviet republics: The case of the Gagauzia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20(4), 738-756. doi: 1080/01419870.1997.9993987

- King, C. (2000). *The Moldovans: Romania, Russian, and the politics of culture*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.
- Küçükler, H. & Curdoglu, A. (2001). Perspectives of teaching in English in Gagauzia in Moldova. *Balkanlarda Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Araştırmaları*, 3(1), 25-38. doi: 10.47139/balted.799025
- Landry, R., & Allard, R., & Deveau, K. (2010). *Schooling and cultural autonomy: A Canada-wide study in Francophone minority schools*. Canada: Canadian Heritage. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.568292/publication.html>
- Le Page, R. & Tabouret-Keller, A. (1985). *Acts of identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Menz, A. (2003). Endangered Turkic languages: The case of Gagauz. (M. Janse & S. Tol, ed.). *Language death and language maintenance* (pp. 143-155). Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/cilt.240.09men
- Menz, A. (2006). On complex sentences in Gagauz. (H. Boeschoten & L. Johanson, ed.). *Turkish Languages in Contact* (pp. 139-151). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Menz, A. (2007). The Gagauz between Christianity and Turkishness. In F. Kiral et. Al (Eds.), *Cultural changes in the Turkic world* (pp. 123-130). Baden Baden: Ergon Verlag.
- Menz, A. (2013). Tehlikedeki Türk dilleri: Gagauzca örneği. *Tehlikedeki Diller Dergisi*, 2(2), 145-156. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/tdd/issue/29412/314978>
- Moseley, C. (20 June 2020). *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. <http://unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas>
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. (20 June 2020). *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova*. <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&id=2193&idc=263>
- Oakes, P. & Haslam, S. A. (1994). *Stereotyping and social reality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Ochs, E. (1992). Indexing gender. (A. Duranti & C. Goodwin, ed.). *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon* (pp. 335-358). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Özkan, N. (2016). *Gagavuz Türkçesi grameri*. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.
- Phillips, A. (2010). What's wrong with essentialism? *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 11(1), 47-60. doi: 10.1080/1600910X.2010.9672755
- Sağlam, N. A. & Adigüzel, Y. (2021). Gagauz identity in the post-Soviet period. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, 63, 279-296. doi: 10.26650/JECS2020-0112
- Sallabank, J. (2013). *Attitudes to endangered languages: Identities and policies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139344166
- Silverstein, M. (1995). Linguistic categories, and cultural description. (B. Blount, ed.). *Language, culture, and society: A book of readings* (pp. 187-221). Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Stets, J. E. (2006). Identity theory. (P. J. Burke, ed.). *Contemporary social psychological theories* (pp. 88-110). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Suny, R. G. (2012). The contradictions of identity: Being Soviet and national in the USSR and after. (M. Bassin & C. Kelly, ed.). *Soviet and post-Soviet identities* (pp. 23-66). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tishkov V. A. (1997). *Ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space*. New York: SAGE Publications.
- Vogt, H. (2005). *Between utopia and disillusionment: A narrative of the political transformation in Eastern Europe*. New York: Berghahn Books. doi: 10.3167/9781571818959