

ROMANIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF BILINGUALISM: ASPIRATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Ludmila BRANIȘTE

branisteludmila@yahoo.com

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași (Romania)

Abstract: *Our contribution is concentrated upon the issue of the functioning of the Romanian language in the Republic of Moldova a subject of controversial and polemic discussions. They are caused by politicization and excessive ideologizing of everything that deals with Romanian history, language, culture and civilization. The aim of this article is to present the political regimes that have alternated since 1812 in order to bring into the limelight the adverse consequences as well as the measures that need to be taken in the context which implies bilingualism, semi-lingualism and diglossia. The paper presents the stages, the manipulative strategies of denationalization and linguistic distortion of the national identity of the autochthonous population in the Republic of Moldova. We exemplify and comment upon the modifications in the structure of the Romanian language and the artificial and even absurd character of the so-called Moldavian language. Moreover, the legislative basis is briefly presented in order to underline the efforts made by the Romanian population with the view of lessening the results of forced Russification and reviving their native language both in popular use and as the official language of the Republic of Moldova.*

Keywords: *ideologizing, diglossia, politicization, national language, politicization.*

*The first instrument of the genius of a people
is its language.
(Stendhal)*

1. Introduction. It is widely known that the territory between Prut and Dniester used to be a part of medieval Moldova which later became a Romanian region. It is also assumed that Romanian belongs to the Romance family of languages. The issue of the usage of the Romanian language in the Republic of Moldova has been a subject of long and controversial discussions. The reasons for this are: politicization, excessive ideologization of anything dealing with Romanian history, language, literature and culture in the region under discussion. Each regime came with its own policies and strategy which

immediately influenced the spiritual area. The aim of this paper is to discuss in which ways the political regimes that came to power from 1812 until now destructively affected population and the measures which need to be taken at present.

2. The sad destiny of this territory began in 1812 when it was occupied by the tsarist Russia being called Basarabia. “The regime established here was of a colonial character, first and foremost, because of the intense process of Russification” (Cincilei, 2008: 15-22). “There had not been a single Romanian school or institution since 1880” (Nistor, 1991: 249-257). Even in church “the local language had been banned since 1870s” (Cazacu, 1992: 193). The Russian language was declared the official one. In the late 19th century the region saw almost total illiteracy. According to data of the first population-census in Russia organized in 1897, only 6, 1% of the Basarabian Romanians could read and write. Demographic modifications and the enslaving of the local population prompted negative changes for national identity. A century of denationalization and tsarist administration succeeded in making the Basarabian Romanians forget their origins, introducing the terms *Moldavians*, *Moldavian language*. The diglossia established in Basarabia implied the disappearance of the Romanian language in Basarabia. Quite a few persecuted intellectuals left for Romania, whereas others managed to fight for their rights in court, achieving the Union of the Democratic Republic of Moldova with Romania in 1918. Basarabia developed as a Romanian region until 1940. The USSR continued its Romania-phobic policy, proclaiming the formation of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (the Moldavian ASSR) as a part of Ukraine in 1924. The occupation of Basarabia in 1812 and the process of intense Russification had to be justified in some way. In the interwar period, there were concepts and so-called *scientific* theories serving the imperial policy. A representative example is *la science eurasiiste*. „Les eurasiistes proposent une nouvelle définition géographique et historique de la Russie”, the general idea of these *scholars* consisting in the assumption that „la Russie ne faisait partie ni de l’Europe, ni de l’Asie, qu’elle formait un troisième continent nommé Eurasie, un „monde à part...un monde culturel totalement différent, séparé par un abîme de la culture européenne, et infiniment supérieur par ses valeurs ethniques, esthétiques et spirituelles à tout ce qui a été produit en Europe” (Sériot, 2008: 248-261). In 1927, N. Trubetzkoy defines this new world:

„Le substrat national de l’Etat qui autrefois s’appelait l’Empire russe et maintenant s’appelle l’URSS ne peut être que l’ensemble des peuples qui habitent cet état, envisagé comme une nation particulière, faite de plusieurs peuples et qui, en tant que telle, possède son nationalisme” (Trubetzkoy *apud* Sériot, 2008: 248-261).

New concepts of *nation* and *nationality* appeared. Over 130 nationalities were brought together by the idea of *homo sovieticus* “the national symbol of which was the language of the great Russian people” (Trubetzkoy *apud* Sériot, 2008: 248-261). The main feature was “le maintien à tout prix de la totalité étatique de ce qui avait été l’Empire russe, qui s’appelait maintenant l’URSS... de démontrer le caractère antinaturel, artificiel de tout découpage de cette totalité vivante” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). The demarcation line between Europe and Asia was redefined by Savitzky. „La frontière de l’Oural, habituellement reconnue comme limite entre l’Europe et l’Asie, est artificielle. Une ligne reliant les points les plus rapprochés de l’isthme formé par la bande de terre située entre la Baltique et la mer Noire” (Savitzky *apud* Sériot, 2008: 248-261) figures a more *natural border*.

It was the line Murmansk – Brest – Litevsk – Galați. It « sépare très nettement la Bessarabie de la Roumanie » (Sériot, 2008: 248-261).

The political goal was to demonstrate that Basarabia fits perfectly into the Euroasiatic frontiers/the borders of the USSR and not the European ones/particularly, the Romanian ones. The linguists also suggested the concept of “union des langues” defined by N. Trubetzkoy: « Plusieurs langues d’un même domaine géographique et historico-culturel peuvent manifester des traits de similitudes, quand bien même cette ressemblance provient d’un voisinage prolongé...et d’un développement parallèle, et non d’une origine commune. » (Trubetzkoy *apud* Sériot, 2008: 248-261).

R. Jakobson, in his theory called *les unions phonologiques de langues*, completed the studies with the excessive exploitation of “le phénomène de mouillure des consonnes”, borrowed from the popular dialect of Rybnitza region which was subjected to linguistic corruption. He reached the conclusion: « Dans les langues romanes, aucune ne présente le phénomène de mouillure, sauf le moldave, qu’en russe. » (Jakobson, 1931: 373). Proceeding from the non-scientific premises, the Euroasiatic experts introduced non-scientific terms: *mnogonarodnaya natsiya*, *homo sovieticus*, *language unity*, *Moldavian language*. Against this pseudo-theoretic background the Marr theory comes into being dealing with the class-character of the language and proletkultism which clearly separates the bourgeois and the proletarian cultures.

The Moldavian ASSR experiences the creation of the socialist Moldavian nation and of Moldavian language, considered to be different from Romanian. It was regarded as the language of bourgeois salons. The Latin alphabet was replaced with the Cyrillic one since “l’alphabet cyrillique est intrinèquement supérieur à l’alphabet latin” (Trubetzkoy *apud* Sériot, 2008: 248-261). In order to accelerate the creation of a new language rapid actions were taken. A new orthography of the Moldavian language is adopted (a grammar of the Moldavian language edited in Tiraspol in 1930 in the Cyrillic script; a Russian-Moldavian dictionary). An important role was attributed to a vocabulary different from that of the Romanian language defining the purification of the Moldavian language from Romanian and French words (*a felicită* was replaced with *a pozdravi/pozdravlyai*). Most of the words were composed of Russian and Moldavian elements formed after the Russian model (*barometru*=*aeromăsurător*, *oxygen*=*aeronăscător*, *avion*=*sunguruzburător*, *automobile*=*sungurumărgător*, *lingvistică*=*limboștiință*). This artificial language was not understood by the people and hardly ever used in real communication – “a language without speakers” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). The alleged enrichment of the Moldavian language was a “disguised form of Russification of the local population with the view of creating a language and a national identity different from that of the Romanians” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). The second soviet occupation of Basarabia, in 1940 (*Cf.* Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; 1939), created the conditions for extending the MSSR rule and forming the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The major objective of the tsarist and soviet linguistic policies was identical: the assimilation of the local population.

The methods of enforcing policies were different. Tsarist authorities openly declared their intentions: devaluation of the local language, complete prohibition of the national schools and officialization of the Russian language. “The moment the speakers of a language are deprived of the right to use this language in educating children, this language loses its status” (Wardhaugh *apud* Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). So, the final goal was the replacement of the local language with Russian. The soviet regime used mystified methods oriented towards the distortion of the ethnic identity, denationalization and assimilation.

During the so-called *developed socialism*, the trend of the centralization of power strengthened creating a single nation on the territory of the Soviet Union with one single identity and language. We aim at *sovietic nation* project. It was bound to be “Russian to a great extent, or at least Russified” (Levada, 1993: 172), while the only language was meant to be Russian. Quick measures were taken in order to realize this plan (e.g. the adoption of the Russian alphabet-1941).

Various concepts were introduced in order to support the policy of Russification. The optimal homogenization of the soviet society was attempted through the system of education by introducing the *school dualism*, according to which parents could choose the language of education. The national schools were replaced with the mixed bilingual Russian-Moldavian ones, encouraging the closure of those teaching in the languages of ethnic minorities. As the social position of a soviet citizen depended on his mastering of the Russian language, parents were put in the situation of “double negation of their ethnic origin: the first time taking the child to a Russian school and the second time depriving him of the possibility of learning his native language” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). Another strategy was *bilingualism* meaning that “the peoples of non-Russian ethnic groups tend to use the Russian language as *lingua franca* on the territory of the Soviet Union” (Browlei et al., 1977: 305).

The term bilingualism implies equal mastering of two languages or the alternative use of the second language. It was intended to ensure equal functions for contacting languages. The sociologic analysis of the functioning of idioms in bilingualism demonstrated that “the contacting languages seldom benefit from an identical status in a certain community” (Closs & Keller *apud* Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). This concept is used when there is an intention to conceal the tensions caused by the use of two or more languages. In this case, the functioning of languages is determined by social and political factors. Canada’s experience of building a bilingual nation did not succeed; one of the reasons of the failure was the “impossibility of equal use of two languages in the same sociolinguistic sphere” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). Social bilingualism has an asymmetric character since the social status and prestige of the languages in contact can hardly be identical. In this respect we will quote the opinion expressed by Sandei-Maria Ardeleanu:

„In verbal interaction, the locutor, whatever his social background, gender, profession etc, will choose the register most suitable in order to reach the goals of the communicative act. The communicative situation and the context of the verbal exchange also determine the choice of the dialect used by the speaker, whereas the dialogues at work, with family members and at an academic meeting will differ.” (Ardeleanu, 2006: 82).

The young generation from Moldova seems to have already overcome the lack of isolation, slowly heading from diglossia towards polyglossia. Statistic data on bilingualism in the former Soviet Empire are eloquent: 3% of Russians knew the language of another nation of the former Soviet Union, whereas 43% of the representatives of non-Russian ethnic groups were bilingual, the second language being Russian (Lapierre, 1998: 100). The data of the census organized in 1989 are convincing: 53, 3% of the Moldovans knew Russian (at present the percentage is much higher) and 11, 2% of Russians knew the Romanian language. *Harmonious* bilingualism became *semilingualism* leading to semi-intellect, inferiority complexes, etc. Bilingualism was also imposed “with the purpose of hindering the access...to the universal circuit of human values” (Silvestru, 1991: 19).

Bilingualism is still practiced only by the local population, whereas the Russians remain monolingual. The Russian language had various strategies of self-affirmation: administrative and office communication, mass media, school, court, army, the subordinate language (Romanian) being deprived of benefits. As a result, “the local language first descends to the level of home jargon, and then, after several generations, comes the period of the ethnic group’s transition from the subordinate language to the dominant one” (Piotrowski, 1997). Imposing Russian as the language of interethnic communication leads to the exclusion of the native language, and the social ignoring of native Romanians. For example, the signboards on the buildings in Bălți, an extremely Russified city, declares *the city of Bălți is a Russian city*, whereas the native population is brutally exiled, making a decision to head towards Romania.

The same signboard reads: *This is our Motherland*. It is the supreme proof of the manipulative and indoctrinating strategies used in Moldova. Bilingualism was favored by communist diglossic ideology being considered suitable for the stage before its elimination and the establishment of Russian as the official language. In such situations « la tendance à la réduction et à l’élimination finale de la situation bilingue est un trait général et permanent » (Martinet, 1982 : 13). “Bilingualism becomes a masque of the numerical minority’s unilingualism if this minority is a government-elite which obliges the majority to become bilingual” (W. Mackey *apud* Colesnic, 2007). The socio-linguistic situation is characterized by diglossia and nonreciprocal bilingualism. Diglossia is “a sociolinguistic situation where two idioms with a different socio-cultural status are used” (Boyer, 2001: 48). Bilingualism infers equal functioning of two languages used in a linguistic community, whereas diglossia admits inequality of their functions. “Bilingualism is a phenomenon related to linguistic adaptability, whereas diglossia directly deals with the social distribution of the contacting languages” (Fishman *apud* Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232), with functional difference conditioned by the asymmetry of political power of different social groups.

Declaring Russian as communication-language, the Romanian language was deprived of its essential functions of integration and global communication, leading to its reduction in the usage-spheres. Dissemination of Russian by all means was the result of concrete linguistic planning of the soviet authorities. They “cause the decline of the disgraced languages which results in its disappearance (death)” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). Examples refer to the experience of the Republic of Moldova as a part of the former USSR. The constraint to use Russian proceeds from its status of the language of interethnic communication in a federation formed by 15 republics. The Russian as official language was not stipulated in the Constitution. Language became a perfect imperial instrument, being spoken by 285 million people who also had 130 national languages. Within 70 years the linguistic instrument spread certain attitudes, behavior, ideology and reactions. Its forced dissemination fertilized the flowers of evil consigning the national essence to oblivion. The disappearance of a language is determined by the diglossic context since « le mécanisme de base du déclin d’une langue s’enclanche lorsque le changement social fait en sorte qu’une communauté linguistique passe sous la coupe d’une autre » (Dressler *apud* Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232).

It was noticed that « une langue disparaît quand ses locuteurs renoncent à la parler au profit de langues de communication plus valorisées » (Rastier, 2007: 2-5), a fact underlining that « des politiques valorisantes d’enseignement et d’édition peuvent parfaitement enrayer le déclin de langues méprisées » (Rastier, 2007: 2-5). Diglossia accelerates the differentiation of the usage-spheres of the contacting languages increasing

their inequality. It generates conflicts between the speakers of two idioms. The linguistic conflict from the Soviet Union did not develop openly. When the linguistic identity of the dominated population is facing danger, the linguistic conflict acquired an acute form reflected in manifestations in favor of national revival and the wish to define its identity (1988-1989). A linguistic conflict usually results in the elimination of the dominating language by the dominated one. It stands for the essential objective of the imperial forces. However, the Romanian population in the Republic of Moldova managed to resist not only due to the writers' deliberate fight for their natural means of expression, but also due to the efforts of the speakers, first and foremost, those from the rural areas. So, the real situation created in the Republic of Moldova is that of diglossia. When instead of the equality of languages, there is "an unequal equality" (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232), an unequal bilingualism ensures linguistic assimilation.

The first step towards linguistic assimilation consists of using the articulation of discourse borrowed from the dominant language (*privet* instead of *salut*, *stroică* instead of *santier*). At the next stage borrowings from Russian massively penetrate and influence its lexical production (*m-am osvobodit* instead of *m-am eliberat*, cf. *osvoboditsa*). The assimilation extends to grammatical structures acting for the last stage of the disappearance of a language (Hagège, 2000: 106). Both diglossia and unequal bilingualism had an adverse effect upon the native language of the Romanians from the Republic of Moldova. The linguistic situation dramatically influenced the speech of the majority of population (except the intellectuals) which used artificial means of communication resembling "an ersatz of Romanian" (Berejan, 2004: 51-53). Nowadays, the degradation of the Romanian language reached a high level. It was "exhausted, devastated, disguised, polluted, Russified and denaturalized so that, when compatriots speak, you are able to recognize only the morphological structure, the lexis and syntax remaining unfamiliar" (Ciobanu, 2006: 15-28). The Moldavian language invented by the soviet totalitarian ideology replaced "Romanian that was dying in this region" (Cincilei, 2008: 15-22).

Thus, the linguistic policy adopted by the tsarist government and the soviet totalitarian regime were aimed at the distortion of the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of the autochthonous population from tsarist Basarabia and soviet Moldova. The context was set up "by the policy of justification of the tsarist Russia's annexation of Bessarabia and the forced incorporation of Moldova in the Soviet Empire, which is the basis of the linguistic, social and political difficulties of the present Moldavian state in general and the process of democratic transition in particular" (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232). The Russian historian Batiushkov directly confirms the imperial spirit of Russian politics:

"If we want the Russian population in this region not to be Romanized and Basarabia to be actually regarded as not only a Russian province and not to be the object of Romanian aspirations...and to be organically united with the rest of Russia, it is necessary to familiarize Moldavian peasants with the Church Slavonic language and to make them half Russians through language with the help of schools". (Batiushkov *apud* Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, promising changes were introduced in the linguistic legislation of the Republic of Moldova. In 1989, three linguistic laws were adopted. The first law gives the Moldavian language the status of state-language of the MSSR, but the notion of "Moldavian language" remained in the Constitution. Another law specifies the returning to the Latin script, fact attesting the Latin origin and its identity to

Romanian language. The most controversial law is the one controlling the functioning of languages in the Republic of Moldova. It proclaims Moldavian as state-language performing the functions of a language of interethnic communication on the territory of the Republic. Russian is legalized along with the Moldavian language as means of interethnic communication, ensuring national bilingualism. Russian is accorded with the same social status as the official language. This implies discrimination of other languages spoken on the territory of the Republic of Moldova” (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232).

According to the census of 2004, the Russian ethnic group amounts to 5, 9% from the population of the Republic of Moldova, whereas the percentage of the Ukrainian ethnic group is of 8, 4%. Hence, the privileged status of Russian can hardly be justified. After two decades of independence, the Moldavian language, bilingualism and diglossia are still present. The implemented laws are still significant since they are oriented towards the promotion of the language and culture of the titular ethnic group as symbols of national identity. Poor results have already been achieved by means of the efforts done by scholars and intellectuals supported by civil society. Tens of volumes of valuable studies on this issue have been edited, conferences, national and international symposiums have been organized, poems and melodies about the Romanian language have been composed, strikes and protests have been organized, culminating with the national meetings in the central square of Chisinau. Millions of people have participated in these events since « les peuples ne semblent pas très disposés à changer de langue maternelle comme on change de marteau » (Leclerc, 1986 : 130).

Fighters for the national revival have been supported by famous scholars from Romania, Russia, Ukraine, France, Switzerland, America, Israel, etc. The adoption of these laws prompted few modifications for the benefit of the Romanian language. The improvements are illustrated by the attitude of the population towards the Romanian language. According to a survey conducted in 2007 (Moldoveanu, 2007: 75-232), the number of the Romanian language speakers increased, as well as the percentage of those who believe that the correct name of our language is Romanian. 85% of the respondents acknowledged that Romanian and Moldavian cannot be regarded as two different languages. Pronunciation and language skills have improved due to the fact that young people choose to study in Romania. As far as communication practice is concerned, the situation remains unchanged. Russian linguistic environment is still preserved. Russian is spoken more often in markets, shops, transport and in offices, as the superiors are Russian (80% of the businessmen). Few deputies speak Russian even in the Parliament. This situation is possible because of the non-fulfillment of the linguistic legislation. Otherwise, there will be no motivation (Chirilă, 2021: 202) for the ethnic groups to learn the official language since they feel no need to. Summing up, a new conception and a linguistic legislation based upon scientific truth and in line with international standards need to be implemented. The scientific material published since 1989 contains a few ideas, concepts and suggestions deserving to be considered. We highlight the essential ones.

„Language is infinite (endless), thus we have to face the consequences, language starts, first and foremost, with language” (Barthes, 2002: 93).

- It should be mentioned in the Constitution that the correct name of the language is Romanian. This would stop dividing the population into those who support the Romanian language and those who support the Moldavian one; this division is especially tangible between the ruling elite and the intellectuals.

- Romanian as the language of the titular ethnic group should be legalized as official state language with its obligatory use in all spheres of social life.
- Romanian needs to become “the only real language of interethnic contact which deserves to serve as the basis in the process of social integration of all citizens who live on this territory regardless of their ethnicity” (Cotelnic, 2003: 262-265). Few countries with national minorities have only one official language of communication. In France, national minorities account to almost 38% from its population, in Spain and in Turkey this percentage reaches 39% and 30% respectively, but nobody suggests legalizing two or three official languages.
- Legislation should stipulate teaching the Romanian language at all educational levels.
- On acquiring citizenship the level of mastering the language and culture of Romanians in the Republic of Moldova should be taken into account the way it is done in all civilized countries.
- The production of books in the Romanian language should be increased (at present 2 Romanian books per capita correspond to 17 Russian ones). The Romanian literature in libraries amounts to 6-7%.
- The Audiovisual Law should adopt the language of the titular population (75% Russian broadcasts now).
- The printed media is dominated by Russian publications, whereas the Romanian ones have an insignificant percentage. There are no newspapers edited in Romania. Although the country joined Francophonie, there are no newspapers edited in France, which would stimulate the improvement of the French language skills.

3. Conclusions. In order to bring the linguistic situation in the Republic of Moldova to normal, apart from a clear and unambiguous legislation, a political will of the country's administration should be displayed. This would create favorable conditions for the functioning of such legislation.

It has been confirmed that „the intensity of the transmission of linguistic facts varies for different speakers, taking into consideration their age, profession and education” (V.-C. Grefelian (Pitișciuc), 2019: 273).

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