

Romanian-Speaking Communities Outside Romania: Linguistic Identities

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Abstract—Romanian-speaking communities are spread much widely than the territory of Romania, being autochthonous inhabitants in the Republic of Moldova, regions of Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Republic of Macedonia and Croatia. Beside the Romanic origin of language, the etymology borrowed several influences from Slavic, Greek, Turkic, Hungarian, Germanic and other languages. Traditionally divided into four dialects, Romanian language includes more regional varieties, some of the idioms being spoken only outside Romania. Linguistic identity not corresponding always with the ethnic one, although there can be found several identifications of the Romanian-speaking communities. The main factor which contributes to the preservation of the Romanian language is the access to educational and cultural rights, which allow developing the ethno-linguistic consciousness.

Index Terms—Dialects, identity, language, native speakers, Romanian.

I. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

Romanian language represents the easternmost extension of Romanic languages in Europe. It belongs to the Indo-European Linguistic Family. The origin of Romanian language is based on the ancient processes of Romanization in South-Eastern Europe, by assimilation of local, mainly Thracian-Illyrian population. The Romanization of Dacians, local branch of these populations, took part in the early centuries AD.

Later, various linguistic influences have occurred, giving rise to the current Romanian language dialects. Considering the historical processes and geographical position, by migrations of different ethnic origin population in the area of Romanian ethnogenesis, the linguistic interferences took part as well. Among the most important influences was from the part of Slavic languages. It starts from the early 6th century and can be considered to be until present for some of the Romanian-speaking minorities in the territories of actual countries as Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Republic of Macedonia or even in the Republic of Moldova (especially in the eastern part). Slavic influences are indispensable for the etymological background, although in the literary language starting with the middle 19th century it is tendencies to reduce it. Other Indo-European languages which influenced Romanian was Greek, also direct or indirect word borrows from Germanic and Iranian languages. Since the 19th century, following the Romanic origin of language and intellectual movements, Romanian literary language took many official

words and terminology from French or Italian, but the last evolution is related to the global process of English influences. From non-Indo-European languages, two major linguistic families had influences on Romanian vocabulary. Both are connected with the important waves of migrations to the ethnic Romanian area. One represented the Altaic Family, with the Turkic group, which influenced since the 9th up to 19th centuries by various interferences with the Turkic populations (as Avars, Cumans, Pechenegs, Oguz, Tatars, Turks etc.). The second belongs to the Uralic Family, Ugric group, represented by the Hungarians, who migrated to the area since 9th century.

By different estimations the etymological fund of Romanian language have about 60 % of Romanic (Latin), 20 % of Slavic, 5 % of Hungarian and less than 5 % of Turkic, Greek, French, Germanic, Iranian, Arabic and other origins. To be mentioned that absolute majority of the words of Arabic and Iranian origin was borrowed through the Turkic languages. Important to mention that ancient Thracian (Dacian) words representing less than 2 % of the Romanian vocabulary are generally common with the Albanian language, demonstrating the close ties between Thracian and Illyrian dialects.

II. GEOGRAPHY OF ROMANIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

Romanian-speaking communities can be divided between the autochthonous one and the Diaspora which consisted of newly migration waves. There are important differences also on the linguistic background between these two types of communities. The autochthonous Romanian-speaking communities are generally based on compact and continuous area of historic and linguistic evolution, even the political border doesn't correspond to the ethno-linguistically one. They are represented by the dialectal variations of the common language, with the gradual transition from one to another idiom. In contrast, the communities which form new Diaspora are based on the recent migrations, often from various regions, which make the different linguistic specific, generally influenced by the surrounding languages.

Following the national unity ideas, Romanian-speaking population, which developed under separate political entities since the middle age, starting with the middle 19th century and finishing in 1918, formed Romanian national state, which has the ideal to include all the Romanian-speaking regions in one political unit. Even the territory of Romania suffered several changes during the 20th century; we can consider that part of Romanian ethno-linguistic area was never included in the Romanian political entity.

Nowadays, ethnic Romanian population is concentrated in

the territory of Romania, representing 16.8 millions or 88.6% of the total population, although the Romanian-speaking population which represent 17.2 millions (90.6%), include also persons with different ethnic affiliation.

Romanian-speaking populations form the majority in 40 of 42 districts of the country (over 90 % in 26 districts).

Romanian-speaking communities abroad are concentrated in the neighbour countries and regions, some of them forming the continuity of the same ethnic area and another being the reminiscences of the former larger areas, currently linguistically and respectively ethnically assimilated by other nations.

Republic of Moldova can be considered as the second country with the native Romanian-speaking population. It is de-facto an entity based on the same Romanian national background, although with the identity and linguistic self-identification crisis. There are 2.6 millions of Romanians, from which 2.5 millions are declared as Moldavians by the 2004 census. Even more complicated is the self-declaration of Mother tongues, recorded as Moldavian for 2 millions and Romanian for 0.5 millions. Practically it is the difference of ethnic and linguistic self-identification, objectively being the same. Romanians/ Moldovans represent 78 % of the total population, but little bit less by linguistic criteria. They represent majority in 33 of 35 of the rayons of Republic of Moldova, in 16 rayons forming over 90% of population.

Separate situation exist for the part of the Republic of Moldova which is not under control of the official authorities, the self-proclaimed entity of "Dniester Moldovan Republic", which promote Russian linguistic policy. By the 2004 census of self-proclaimed authorities Moldovans are 0,18 million, which represent around 31 % of total population, being majority in the 4 of 7 rayons.

Another country with important Romanian-speaking communities is Ukraine, which include parts of historical Moldova, where the native population is Romanian. According to the 2001 census Romanian-speaking population comprise 0.4 million inhabitants, divided between two ethnic categories: Romanian (0.15 million) and Moldavian (0.25 million). Romanian-speaking communities are concentrated in the Chernovtsy (0.18 mil), Odessa (0.12 mil), Zakarpatya (0.03 mil), Nikolayev (0.01 mil) and Kirovograd (0.01 mil) regions. Assimilation processes take part in the detriment of Romanian-speaking communities.

Romanian-speaking population is autochthonous one in the countries of Balkan region, where majority of them are not recognized as Romanian minorities and don't have any linguistic rights.

Serbia concentrates quite important Romanian-speaking communities, along the border with Romania and not only. By official data census there are recorded 0.08 mil Romanians and Vlachs, in reality the number of Romanian-speaking population is up to 0.3 millions. There are two major regions with the compact Romanian-speaking population, western part of Banat in Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the eastern Serbia, known also as Timok region.

For Bulgaria official data are even less veridical, only 0.01 mil. are recognized as Romanians / Vlachs, de facto over 0.1 million of Romanian-speaking population lives compactly in

the northern part of the country. Important number of the so-call Rudari, Romanian-speaking population of Gypsy origin, lives also in the central and eastern part of Bulgaria.

Republic of Macedonia recognise 0.01 mil Romanians, as Vlachs, the total number of this minority can be up to 0.1 mil, mainly in the Southern and Eastern part of the country.

Albania include a number up to 0.2 Aromanians, forming compact communities in the South of the country, especially in the districts of Korca, Pogradec, Vlora, Durres, Elbasan, Permet.

For Greece is even more complicated to confirm the number of Romanian-speaking population, due the fact that is no available any ethnic and linguistic official data. By the estimations of researchers can be still considered up to 0.3 million of the Aromanian dialect speakers in the regions of Northern and particularly North-Western part (Epirus).

Croatia has a small autochthonous minority of Romanian language, known as Istro-Romanians, in the Istria peninsula, of less than 1 thousand persons. Some other 30 thousand can be added as the Baiesi, a Romanian-speaking population of mix origin, in the Northern parts of the country.

Hungary include some localities with Romanians, 0.01 million, in the border region with Romania and some more than 0.1 million of Baiesi in the south.

Due more recent migration processes Romanian-speaking communities are located now in various countries of the world, especially in Europe, USA, Canada and former USSR.

Moldavian communities are present in Russian Federation (0.17 mil), Kazakhstan (0.02 mil) and other former Soviet republics. There are different histories and time of migrations. Some communities was migrated during 19th century and settled as agrarian colonists in Russia, another are consequences of the deportations by the Stalin's regime, but the majority today represents the work emigration to the main cities and oil regions from Russia. The origins of these communities are from the native territories from Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Communities in Europe are established in some countries up to one century, but the absolute majority is of the new migration waves of the last 20 years. The linguistic preferences to the Romanic – speaking countries can be considered very important in the determinism of migration destination for Romanians. So, Italy, Spain, France and Portugal concentrate the most important number of Romanian-speaking communities from recent Diaspora, coming from Romania, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Serbia. In countries like Italy and Spain the number of Romanian-speaking population is over 1 million and up to 0.5 mil. in France or 0.2 mil. in Portugal. Other European countries with high Romanian-speaking number of migrants are Germany (0.2 mil), United Kingdom (0.1 mil), Greece (0.1), Austria (0.2), Switzerland (0.2), Sweden (0.1), Denmark (0.08), Belgium (0.08), almost all the European countries having a Romanian-speaking communities. In USA are over 0.7 mil and Canada 0.3 mil. Romanian-speaking communities are to be found in Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Israel and other countries.

III. ETHNO-LINGUISTIC UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF ROMANIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

By the linguistic criteria Romanian language can be divided in four main dialects: *Daco-Romanian*, *Aromanian* (*Macedo-Romanian*), *Megleno-Romanian* and *Istro-Romanian*.

Daco-Romanian dialect it is by far the most important and numerous. The area of formation for this dialect is considered to be the regions north of the Danube, but should be taken in account that large regions south of the Danube also belong to the Daco-Romanian Linguistic domain. The total number of the native speakers of this dialect is over 23 millions. It include the whole Romania, Republic of Moldova, regions of Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary and the absolute majority of the Romanian-speaking Diaspora. Being the largest dialect it also means the highest diversity. By Romanian linguists it is divided in several sub-dialects, particularly in the *Muntean*, *Oltean*, *Bănăţean*, *Crîşean*, *Maramureşean* and *Moldovenesc*. We can distinguish also regional and local idioms, as well a wide range of the transitional idioms between the main sub-dialects. For example for the Moldovan sub-dialect, can be identified Northern, North-Eastern, Central and Southern idioms. By regions, *Muntean* sub-dialect is spoken in the South-Eastern part of Romania and Northern Bulgaria, *Oltean* in South-Western Romania, North-Western Bulgaria, continued also in the neighbour Serbia. *Bănăţean* sub-dialect is specific for the western part of Romania and for the Romanian-speaking communities in Serbia. *Crîşean* is located in North-Western Romania and neighbour Hungary, *Maramureşean* in Northernmost part of Romania and Zakarpatya region of Ukraine. Moldovan sub-dialect generally covers the historical regions of Moldova, actually divided by Romania (North-Eastern part of Romania), Republic of Moldova, Chernovtsy and Odessa regions of Ukraine.

The Romanian literary language was developed on the basis of *Muntean* idiom, following, as in the majority of cases, the location of capital city and centre of the country. The linguistic model was strongly attached to the French one, with a centralized form based on the predominance of literary language. Regional idioms of Romanian language remained only at the level of spoken dialects, without the development in writing or any other institutionalized form. Was cultivated the prestigious, cultural and correct literary language in opposition with the regional or local dialects as non-prestigious and useless linguistic idioms. This has as effect from one side the consolidation of the Romanian common literary language inside Romania and dissolution of the Romanian idioms outside the national state, especially where no any educational facilities in mother tongue was.

Aromanian dialect is second one by the numerical importance and area of spreading. It includes the reminiscence of Romanized population in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The distribution of Aromanian-speaking communities is very scattered. Being affected by linguistic and identity assimilation from the surrounding titular nationalities, the number of native speakers continuously decreased, being less than 0.5 million in present. The native area of spreading is northern Greece (Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia), southern Albania, southern

and eastern parts of the Republic of Macedonia and small portion in the south-western Bulgaria. By migration processes in 19th and 20th centuries Aromanian communities are present also in Romania (especially in Dobrogea), France, and Germany, USA, Australia and other countries. Aromanian dialect includes two main sub-dialects, *Gramostean* spoken in Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria and *Farserot* mainly in Albania.

Megleno-Romanian dialect is one of the smallest and extinct idioms spoken by the less than five thousands people, self-identified as *Vlasi*. The native region of the *Megleno-Romanian* population is situated near the Vardar / Axios River, known as Meglen, and divided by the actual border between Greece and Republic of Macedonia. Outside this region there are small communities also in Romania and Turkey.

Istro-Romanian dialect it is by far the most endangered idiom, with the less than one thousand speakers, present in a few small villages from Istria, in Croatia.

The Romanian linguistic identity can be considered as the main factor for the Ethnic identification as Romanians. But due the historical, geographical and political reasons, many of the Romanian-speaking communities do not share the same Ethnic identity as Romanians. Often, even quite artificially, the use of the glotonym *Romanian* is contested by some of the communities. This process is encouraged or even created by the authorities for the reason to split the Romanian ethnic identity in smaller denominations of regional or synonym character.

Among the Romanian-speaking communities outside Romania there are following linguistic identities:

A. Romanian

Specific for the regions where the Romanian language have the right of school education, is in church services and cultural institutions. Such communities are in the parts of Northern Bukovina and Herta, in Chernovtsy region and in Zakarpatia region both in Ukraine. In Serbia only in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina there are all the ethno-linguistic rights provided. The same is for the small Romanian community in Hungary, near the border with Romania. Some other regions are confronted with the interior dispute among the same Romanian-speaking population, concerned the denomination of the language. This is the case for the Republic of Moldova and Odessa, partially Chernovtsy and other regions in Ukraine, extended also to the whole former countries of the USSR.

B. Moldavian

The use of glotonym Moldavian is related to the political-territorial entity of Moldova, since the middle ages. The excessive politicization of the linguistic and ethnic identity in the Republic of Moldova during the Soviet time and until nowadays has a destructive and negative impact on the society. Instead to understand the natural interrelation between the regional spoken idioms in Moldova, which can freely be considered as *Moldavian* and common literary language developed with the same standards and known as *Romanian*, the political and academic media wrongly opposite these two similar denominations? Even if was a

chance to develop the separate literary language, based only on the Moldavian dialectal idioms, this has not happened. The use of Cyrillic alphabet for the Romanian language in the historical Moldova regions under the Soviet Union administration between 1945 until 1989 did not represent the sufficient argument for a separate language. Though, in the self-proclaimed “Dniester Moldavian Republic”, Cyrillic alphabet it is still in official use, mainly due to the strong opposition against the Romanian ethnic and linguistic unity, promoted by this Russian-oriented regime.

C. Vlach

Representing well-known historical synonym for Romanian, even older of origin, actually this ethnic and linguistic term it is promoted by the authorities of Serbia and Bulgaria in order to invent a separate language name and ethnic consciousness for the Romanian-speaking communities in these countries. If Moldavian, represent a regional variety, the Vlach idiom doesn't exist, being generally as exonym for the Romanian-speaking population used by the surrounding Slavic, Greek and other populations. Nevertheless, especially in Serbia, starting the process to constitute a separate literary language call *Vlach*, with different other invented names as *Vlarumanian*, just for the purpose to divide the numerous Romanian-speaking community in several pieces. In fact native speakers in Romanian idioms don't use the term Vlach, but Romanian (with regional form as Rumanian), only the Megleno-Romanians and partially Istro-Romanians use the ethnonym of Vlach for the self-identification.

D. Aromanian

Have a specific situation, due the fact, that it is a recognized dialect which has a separate literary form. Still not rich the consolidation as one standard literary form, it uses different regional idioms of this dialect, depending from the country to country. The most developed literature existing in the Republic of Macedonia, less in Albania, Romania and Bulgaria and almost very rare in Greece. Generally was chosen the Latin alphabet, but still can be found inscriptions in Greek or Cyrillic, especially with the Folkloric character. Disputable is the ethnic and linguistic identity and hierarchy concerning Aromanian relation to Romanian. By one part of this community and scientists is considered to belong to the common Romanian linguistic and ethnic identity, by others it is a strong movement toward separate, Aromanian (with alternative names as Macedo-Romanian, Vlach, Armani) identity.

E. Baiasi

Romanian-speaking communities of Gypsy and mix origin, present mainly in Hungary, Croatia and Serbia. In Hungary

occurs the process of separate standard language creation.

The use of glotonyms as *Megleno-Romanian* and *Istro-Romanian* is of the scientific provenience, being attributed to these specific dialects to distinguish them from the geo-linguistically point of view. Gradually, some of the native speakers took over these names, but not so widely.

Linguistic identity and the language denomination has greater influence on the Ethnic identity and Ethno-Cultural processes among the Romanian-speaking communities, which are currently developing in two opposite directions, of ethnic-linguistic consolidation and fragmentation.

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