

ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND ITS DIALECTS

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ABSTRACT:

THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE, THE CONTINUANCE OF THE LATIN LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN THE EASTERN PARTS OF THE FORMER ROMAN EMPIRE, COMES WITH ITS FOUR DIALECTS: DACO-ROMANIAN, AROMANIAN, MEGLENO-ROMANIAN AND ISTRO-ROMANIAN TO COMPLETE THE EUROPEAN LINGUISTIC PALETTE. THE ROMANIAN LINGUISTS HAVE ALWAYS SHOWN A PERMANENT CONCERN FOR BOTH THE IDENTITY AND THE STATUS OF THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND ITS DIALECTS, THUS SUPPORTING THE EXISTENCE OF THE ETHNIC, LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL PARTICULARITIES OF THE MINORITIES AND REJECTING, FIRMLY, ANY ATTEMPT TO ASSIMILATE THEM BY FORCE

KEYWORDS: MULTILINGUALISM, DIALECT, ASSIMILATION, OFFICIAL LANGUAGE, SPOKEN LANGUAGE.

The Romanian language - the only Romance language in Eastern Europe - is an "island" of Latinity in a mainly "Slavic sea" - including its dialects from the south of the Danube – Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian. Multilingualism is defined narrowly as the alternative use of several languages; widely, it is use of several alternative language systems, regardless of their status: different languages, dialects of the same language or even varieties of the same idiom, being a natural consequence of linguistic contact. Multilingualism is an Europe value and a shared commitment, with particular importance for initial education, lifelong learning, employment, justice, freedom and security.

Romanian language, with its four dialects - Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian – is the continuance of the Latin language spoken in the eastern parts of the former Roman Empire. Together with the Dalmatian language (now extinct) and central and southern Italian dialects, is part of the Apenino-Balkan group of Romance languages, different from the Alpine–Pyrenean group².

The fact that Latin was spoken in the Eastern Roman Empire, widely in the Balkan Peninsula explains the current geographical distribution of the Romanian dialects in territories both north and south of the Danube. Romanian language unity does not contradict this vastly Romanized space. It is due both to the Latin unity and the unitary character of the substrate language³ being supported, for centuries, by the constant contacts between the Romanized

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² Cf. M. G. Bartoli (1806: 297 ș. u.); cf. and G. Ivănescu (1980: 96). For delineation, in Italy, of the two groups through a "line" linking Spezia, at the Tyrrhenian Sea (the West), to Rimini (according to others, Pesaro), to the Adriatic Sea (the East), according to Wartburg (1950, map 10), Lausberg (1969: 39-40, 69-70).

³ The Vulgar Latin unity that lays at the bases of the Romance languages is widely recognized. Al. Philippide also postulates an original ethnic unity, based on the preponderance of Thracians:

population in the north of the Danube and the one in the Balkan Peninsula, contacts attested by historical sources: "It is totally inaccurate to suppose that the territory currently occupied by Romanian has been entirely abandoned by their ancestors and that there has been no contact between the areas invaded by the barbarians and those protected by the Roman Empire. Historically, it has been undeniably proven that, in the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh and the ninth centuries entire populations have crossed the Danube from south to north and from north to south. From this constant contact and continuous exchange – of which the evacuation of Dacia by Aurelian is only a small part – came the unity of the Romanian people and of its language⁴.

"G I Brătianu underlines the importance of these contacts: "The only conclusion that can be drawn with certainty [from the historical facts study] is the continuous crossing, from one shore to another of the Danube, of some convoys of captives or immigrants at the end of the third century and the beginning of the ninth century; these are frequent exchanges, maybe without major political consequences, but whose linguistic influence is more than obvious." ⁵.

The Daco-Romanian language (the north dialect) is mainly spoken in the north of the Danube, namely in Romania and Moldova as the mother tongue of the majority, but in the immediate vicinity of these two countries, in Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria; it is also spoken in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but only in isolated communities. It is the only dialect that has created a standard – the literary Romanian language - used as official language in Romania and Moldova, with currently about 27 million speakers.

The southern dialects, namely Romanian, Megleno – Romanian and Istro-Romanian are spoken in the Balkan states (in the south of the Danube), the ex-Yugoslav republics: Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia as well as in Bulgaria, Greece and Albania.

The first certifications on dialectal differences occur in 1648, in the preface to the *Noul Testament de la Bălgrad* (New Testament from Bălgrad) (Transylvania), written by the Bishop Simeon Ștefan. With an obvious concern about the formation of unique literary language for all Romanians, the erudite scholar pointed out that "rumânii nu grăiesc în toate țările într-un chip, încănici într-o țarătoți într-un chip (aproximate translation in current Romanian: Romanian people do not speak the same in all countries, but they do not speak the same even in one country)." The explanation of this situation would be that, being spread in several "countries" Romanians "have mingled their words with other languages" ⁶.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the scholar scientist Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), Prince of Moldavia, analyzes, in detail, the issue of the Romanian language and its dialects. D. Cantemir emphasizes the common origin of the Romanians from the north and south of the Danube: "toateacestenăroade (aproximate translation in current Romanian: all these nations" - namely people from the regions called Moldova, Muntenia, Maramures, Romanians over the Danube and Koutsovlach from Greece – coming from the same Trajan's Romanian .

"The uniform feature that this conglomerate acquired, in order to give rise to one people, the Romanian one, and to one language, the Romanian one, is due both to the mixture of elements privileged by the same social and political circumstances and to the prevalence of one of the nations, the Thracian one"(Philippide 1925: 856).

⁴ Brătianu 1937: 60; "Dacia leaving must not be considered under a single text, but under all the facts and the historical realities; thus it appears then as an episode in a series of similar events and not as a "Final caesura" in the history of Roman rule in Eastern Europe "(Brătianu 1937: 123).

⁵ Brătianu 1937: 63. Th. Capidan extended contacts in Europe until the arrival of the Turks: "Taking into account both the language unity and the order of the historical statements by Byzantine

⁶ Ioan Bianu, Nerva Hodoș, *Bibliografia românească veche*, I (1508-1716), București, 1903, p. 170; cf. *Dial. rom.* (1977: 39), *Tratat dial.* (1984: 110).

The historical sources reveal that the Istro-Romanians are descendants of the Romanized population in North-Western of the Balkan Peninsula, which were in territorial contact both with population from the south of the Danube (ancestors of Aromanians and of Megleno-Romanians) the Romanized population from the north of the Danube (western provinces) and the Romanized. This explains Istro-Romanian asymmetries on one hand, with the Daco-Romanian Western dialects and, on the other hand, with the Romanian dialects in the south of the Danube (Megleno-Romanian and Aromanian). As it is obvious, from the historical documents from the twelfth - fifteenth centuries, that the Istro-Romanian ancestors moved gradually to the Dalmatian coast, reaching Istria.

The Megleno-Romanian language is the Eastern Romance language whose history is less known, because it does not have old documentary attestation. While the Aromanian language separated from the other Eastern Romance languages in the ninth century, the Megleno-Romanian language is supposed to have separated from Romanian in a more recent period. One of the hypotheses is that it happened in the eleventh or twelfth centuries. Another theory states that the Megleno-Romanians were settled in Macedonia by the Byzantines only in the fourteenth century⁷.

There are few texts written in Megleno-Romanian. The first were recorded by linguists⁹. There are also several collections of folk literature, and one cultivated work, a brochure on silkworm growth, the script adapted from the Romanian one and terms borrowed from it.

Megleno-Romanians are descendants of the Romanized population from the land situated between the Danube and the Haemus, which is in territorial contact both with the Romanized population in the north of the Danube, and the Romanized population in the south of the Danube (Istro-Romanian and Aromanian ancestors). This explains the similarities of the Megleno-Romanian language, on one hand, with the Daco-Romanian (Southern dialects) and, on the other hand, with the Istro-Romanian and Aromanian. After the battle of Lebnion (Thrace) in 1091, the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus colonized, in the territory of Meglena (Macedonia), a part of the Pechenegs taken prisoners together with their families. Soon after, in 1094, in a decree of the same emperor, Vlachs from Meglena are mentioned, thus understanding that the colonized Pechenegs were either mixed with the Romanians from the Danube lands or met Vlachs that have been living there before.

The Megleno-Romanian shows greater similarities with some dialects of the Aromanian language (eg, Moloviște and Gopeș patois), hence some Megleno-Romanian ancestors moved south with some of the Aromanians. Thesis on the Aromanian language as an independent language and not as a Romanian dialect is recent and began to be known only after 1990, in a political context of regional ethnic revival in the Balkans, which traditionally sought to discourage Aromanians and their language identification with Romania and with the Romanian language. The Aromanian language name is not uniform in all its speakers. According to the regional patois, Aromanians speak armânească, armâneșce, armânești, those who do not speak the language, is estimated at over one million.

Dimitrie Cantemir in *Descriptio Moldaviae* (written between 1714 and 1716), writes the following about the Aromanian language: "The Koutsovlach have a more modified dialect [than that of the inhabitants of Muntenia, compared with the patois of the inhabitants of Moldova, nn], the Koutsovlach living in Rumelia, at the border of Macedonia. They mix harmoniously their country's language with both the Greek and the Albanian ones; so that they mix in their Wallachian language sometimes cracks from the Greek language, other times cracks from the Albanian language. But, anywhere and anytime, they keep the moldavian

⁷ Denomination used not by that people, but by linguists, in the view of dialect status of the Romanian language that is traditionally assigned to the idiom spoken by this population.

ending for nouns and for verbs. It is true that, if they use this modified dialect, they can communicate only between themselves, because neither a Greek, an Albanian nor a Moldavian is able to understand what they say or mean. If the three of them were together in the same place and if they heard Koutsovlachs speaking, they would be certainly able to understand what they mean if each of them would translate to the others cracks of his language”⁸.

Aromanians are successors of the Romanized population in the south of the Balkan Peninsula, in lands where today we find the largest and the most compact group: the Pindos mountain range. There are dialect differences in Aromanian, some patois - eg, the Farsherot - showing greater similarities with the other dialects in the south of the Danube (vocalic system of 6 phonemes, no opposition $\tilde{a} \sim \hat{i}$). This leads us to believe that some of the Aromanians ancestors settled in the existing settlements (where they met a Romanized population that has been living there for a while) coming from the north.

The Romanian Academy has always regarded the Aromanians as part of this people, irrespective of the place of origin. Since the set up of the Romanian Literary Society (1866), that became the Romanian Academic Society (1867), each Romanian subsidiary had - according to the number of inhabitants - 4, 3 or 2 founding members, among which two Aromanians: Ioan D. Caragiani and

Dimitrie Cozacovici (Cosacovici). Over the years, other great representatives of public life, letters, sciences and arts from among Aromanians were received in the Romanian Academy: the Metropolitan Andrei Saguna, the writer and philologist George Murnu, the brilliant translator of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" the linguist Pericle Papahagi, the writer and diplomat Marcu Beza, the linguist Theodor Capidan, author of monographs on Megleno-Romanian and Aromanian dialects, one of the main editors of the Dictionary of Romanian language, the writer and philologist Cezar Papacostea, the literary critic Dumitru Caracostea, the engineer, Astronautics Specialist Elie Carafoli, the painter Ion Paceaetc⁹.

The Daco-Romanian language is the language spoken in the north of the southern Slavic linguistic area (represented by the Serbs, Bulgarians and Macedonian Slavs), especially in the north of the Danube (Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Hungary), but also at its south: in Dobrogea and in Timoc. The term was introduced to distinguish the Romanian language from its 4 dialectal variants: the Daco-Romanian, the Aromanian (macedoromâna) and the Megleno-Romanian, spoken in the territories of southern Balkan peninsula, as well as the Istro-Romanian spoken in the Istria peninsula. The term "Daco-Romanian" contains a reference to the Dacians, because, in Antiquity, the Dacians lived in the Daco-Romanian linguistic area that is currently inhabited by the Romanian speakers (the provinces of Dacia and Moesia, later Dacia Ripensis). Not all linguists recognize these idioms as dialects of the same Romanian, some considering them four independent languages.

Romania has always shown great generosity, constantly supporting the existence of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural particularities of the minorities and rejecting, firmly, any attempt to assimilate them by force.

⁸ Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei*, (Chişinău: Ed. Litera, 1998), 228.

⁹ According to the Romanian Academy Note / 2005.

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