‘Migrant’ Linguistic Patterns - Aspects of Contamination with Respect to the Romanian Language Spoken in Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia

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Résumé: *Le statut de la langue roumaine parlée actuellement sur le territoire de la République Moldave ne représente plus un sujet de débat, du fait que la vérité linguistique a gagné finalement par rapport aux intérêts politiques et en même temps l’identité linguistique de la langue parlée par la population majoritaire de Moldavie a été reconnue par la Constitution. Dans cet article notre attention se tourne vers les exemples de contamination linguistique qui ont fait que la langue roumaine parlée en Moldavie présente beaucoup des traits linguistiques spécifiques à la langue russe. Ce qui nous préoccupe en spécial c’est la zone linguistique controversée, UTA Gagauzia, dont l’identité linguistique et culturelle nous est difficile à définir avec exactitude du fait qu’il y a des énormes contradictions entre ce qui est dit dans les déclarations politiques et la réalité linguistique que les usagés nous laissent entendre.*

Mots-clés: *l’identité linguistique, la contamination, calque linguistique, l’usage linguistique*

The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (GagauzYeri) is located in Moldova and it is formally known as an autonomous region since 1994.The above mentioned autonomy implies jurisdiction over education, culture, spending and security. Their autonomy allows them to legislate language issues, and this is the reason why, even if the State language in Moldova is Romanian, the official languages spoken in UTAG are three: Gagauz, Romanian, and Russian. Gagauz[1] language is motivated by the ethnic majority; hence the close ties to Turkey on the strength of financial and educational support. Romanian, as previously stated, is the state language of Moldova; therefore it is considered among the official languages mostly due to requirements imposed by the educational and/or administrative entities. Last but not least (on the contrary!), Russian[2] is assumed as language of first use and continuing hegemony of Russian language can be explained by the trade relations, Russia being the primary customer for the Gagauzia's wine, and in exchange most of the goods in Gagauzia are of Russian origin.

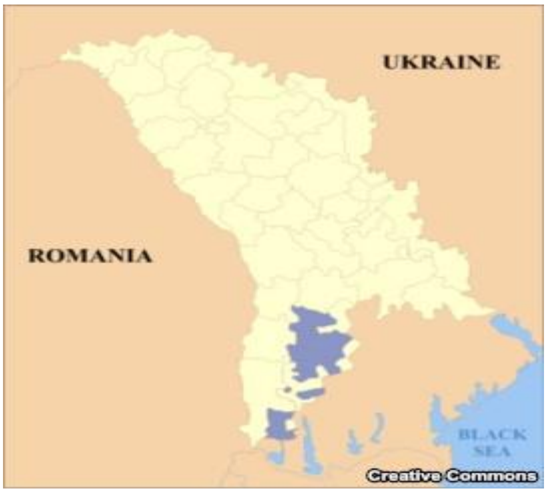

Fig. 1 The blue area marking Gagauzia within Moldova[3]

In fact, the languages, spoken here are reflections of their ethnic composition and, nevertheless, of their history.

Ethnic group	**Population**	**Percent of total**
Gagauz	127,835	82.14%
Bulgarians	8,013	5.15%
Moldovans	*7,481*	*4.81%*
Romanians	*38*	*0.02%*
Russians	5,941	3.82%
Ukrainians	4,919	3.16%
Others	1,409	0.91%

Fig. 1 Ethnic composition of Gagauz People according to the 2004 census results[4]

The table above is relevant to understand the ethnic composition of the region which, surprisingly, does not coincide with the linguistic structure of the population. In fact the status of the languages spoken here is not motivated, as predicted by the above statements, by political factor, linguistic and cultural identity being overshadowed.

Interpreting data in the table, we see that the percentage of Romanians/Moldovans is quite similar to the Russians (4.83% to 3.82%), however the number of people assuming Romanian as language of first use is not even close to the number of people assuming Russian as first choice. Our opinion is that this could be considered a Gagauz paradox as far as Russian language is assumed by the speakers at a personal level being considered the key to social/professional achievement. Paradox is that we are witnessing the continuous hegemony of the Russian language although the Soviet Union no longer exists and the lingua franca status of Russian is no longer imperatively imposed. Accordingly, children (age 10-14) whose parents are Gagauz or Romanian declared their ethnicity as Russian when asked about that, and chose Russian as their native language because this is the only language they use to communicate either public, or private. Therefore we can say that Russian came to represent more than a lingua franca in this context, integrating with the Gagauz people linguistic identity. Its dominance becomes even more relevant when speaking about interferences between this and other languages spoken here. In fact, we see that linguistic practices in Russian language 'migrate' to other languages.

During 50 years of Russification very few schools were teaching Gagauz language, and even fewer were teaching Romanian, therefore, most of the population either ceased using these languages, or continued using them in private talks. Consequently, Romanian (particularly) stopped being spoken in public and people lost their good sense of that language. Since 1991 Romanian has regained its official status in Moldova even if the controversy concerning the differences between Moldovan and Romanian languages have reached an end in 2013 when the Constitutional Court in Moldova decided that the text of the Declaration of Independence prevails over the text of the constitution, confirming that the official language of the Republic of Moldova is Romanian not Moldovan[5].

Eventually, the reassessment of Romanian language implied regaining linguistic competence of a language that has been spoken sporadically for such a long period of time. This process seems to be difficult because the speakers have lost their language skills and they need to supply their lost/forgotten practices. Hence the large number of contaminations with the language they feel comfortable with, the easiest way out of difficult 'verbalization' contexts being the loan translation. Actually, people needing to speak Romanian utter a mix of Russian-Romanian making use of roughly translated phrases (from Russian into Romanian), and adopt them as such in colloquial speech (some of them migrating into formal speech as well).

The particular aspect we are going to point out here is not only the calque of Russian utterances, but the fact that most of these 'migrating' utterances are, in fact, elliptical utterances and their loan leads, eventually, to grammatical blend.

This is the case of a widely used utterance (*Pânămâine!)* which is to be heard among people speaking Romanian as second or foreign language in UTAG. The Russian *Дозавтра!* was calqued into Romanian *Pânămâine!* (*Until tomorrow! – approximate translation),* as an equivalent for *See you tomorrow!.* The new lexeme created by contamination is not specific to Romanian because the Temporal Prepositional Group (PrepGp) is usually associated with a completive function. The realization of the completive is actually achieved by an Adverbial Group (AdvGp) - as the head of the group is an adverb - which is meant to be associated with verbal groups because AdvGp is always semantically related to actions, states, events, attributes, by quantifying, categorizing, enclosing or anchoring (temporally, spatially, aspectual) them. Consequently, the native speakers of Romanian language expect *something to happen / something to be done until tomorrow* when hearing this since they do not assign the above mentioned meaning to this utterance. It is generally accepted that calques utterances are almost always nonsensical. The problem raised by this utterance is not the nonsense that could/should be used as such, but the fact that speakers assign different meanings according to their linguistic competence.

Another commonly used utterance is *Cumsănătatea?* This is again an example of calque from the Russian *Какздоровье?* (*How your health? – approximate translation)*. Unlike the first example, this one is less intrusive. Copula obliteration is quite frequent in Romanian. Therefore, despite the native speakers' reluctance in using unfamiliar utterances, the disambiguation of this structure is not difficult and, respectively, the meaning construction is quite safe.

Interpreting these issues as examples of speakers' struggle to supply the lack of genuine Romanian language tools, we come to illustrate that cultural memory is the echo of all the transformative historical experiences that the Gagauz people experienced over the years. This way we are offering a counterargument to those voices labeling the Gagauz speakers' reluctance towards Romanian language as a form of 'resistance'[6]. Our opinion is that their reluctance (if any) is not to be based on political premises, but on their grounded fear of making mistakes, on their assumed minimum language competence.

In the issue, we may say that these and many other similar examples represent evidence of linguistic adaptability. Thus, speakers complement their poor performance into Romanian with other familiar language tools creating a mixed language. The interference of three languages belonging to different language families (Gagauz –Turkic language, Russian – Slavic language and Romanian – Romance language) prevents speakers from understanding the inappropriateness of the loan translations and, at the same time, help them communicate using this mixed language.

Notes

[1] Gagauz language is known as "the second Oghuz language spoken in Europe" according to Bernd Kortmann, Johan van der Auwera (Eds.), *The Languages and Linguistics of Europe: A Comprehensive Guide* (chapter: The Turkic languages of Europe: 161), and nowadays it is mostly recognized as an endangered language being spoken in small communities by a limited number of speakers (over 50 years of age).

[2] Russian was imposed as lingua franca for all the states of the former Soviet Union during the process of Russification (started in 1939 by Ribentrop-Molotov and ended in 1989).

[3] http://www.rferl.org/content/moldovas_gagauz_autonomous_region_struggles_to_find_a_common_language_with_chisinau/24285661.html

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gagauzia

[5] http://constcourt.md/libview.php?l=en&idc=7&id=512&t=/Overview/Press-Service/News/The-text-of-the-Declaration-of-Independence-prevails-over-the-text-of-the-Constitution.

[6] *„'Pride' Plays A Role In Resistance To Romanian"*: http://www.rferl.org/content/moldovas_gagauz_autonomous_region_struggles_to_find_a_common_language_with_chisinau/24285661.html.

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