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*Ana Vasiliev*

## **Hungarian Language as a Factor of Identity Preservation in Transylvania Nowadays in Comparison with Russian Identity in the Republic of Moldova**

### **1. Theoretical Background**

The linguistic identity is studied in linguistics, psychology, sociology, and the relationship between language and national identity is mainly described in sociolinguistics. Linguistic identity refers to a person's identification as a speaker of one or more languages (Leung, Harris, Rampton, 1997, pp. 543–560). It is an important part of our personal identity. The linguistic identity is influenced by different factors and usually contains aspects such as linguistic expertise, affiliation, and familial inheritance (ibid). One of the first researchers who started to study the connection between language and identity and the effects of language shift on identity is Joshua A. Fishman. The scholar believes a language is always a part of a cultural matrix, and destroying a language is equal to destroying a whole identity (Fishman, 1991, p. 4). Many researchers have pointed out the importance of language for social interaction, cohesion, or distinction from others. According to Alain Dieckhoff, a common language may be the ideal vehicle to express the unique character of a social group, and to encourage common social ties on the basis of a common identity (Dieckhoff, 2004, pp. 187–200). Wright and Kelly write about the dynamic role language plays as a unifying factor in maintaining national identity (Wright, Kelly, 1994, p. 3). Questions of linguistic identity, linguistic exclusion or inclusion, languages in contact, languages in conflict, language purity, language conservation, language prestige are all central to the process (ibid).

### **2. Historical Background: Hungarian Language Use in Transylvania & Russian Language in Moldova**

The problem of language use and national identity in Transylvania has been studied by many Hungarian, Romanian and foreign researchers (Livizeanu, 1995, Trencsényi et al., 2001). Following WW1, the administration in Bucharest adopted

an assimilative policy, which aimed at creating a nationally homogenous state. According to Irina Culic's claim, one of the historical events that determined the present-day identity of Hungarians in Transylvania is the Treaty of Trianon (Culic, 2001, pp. 227–249). After the Great Union (unification of Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina with the Romanian Kingdom), the Hungarians in Transylvania became a minority in the newly created state. They lost their privileges and linguistic rights, and it made them adapt for survival in the new conditions. Later the shock of Trianon led to issues of national and cultural identity as well as intercultural communication (ibid). The other historical event mentioned by Irina Culic is the communist era and Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule, which was a period of de-nationalization, abuse of rights to get education in the mother-tongue and national policy that would fasten the assimilation of Hungarians (ibid).

Following the change of regime in 1989, a constitution adopted in 1991 came into force, but was amended in 2003. The text of the new constitution states that “the official language in Romania is the Romanian language”, which implies the exclusivity of the officiality of the Romanian language (URL1). Despite the fact, that Hungarian is the language of the largest ethnic minority in Romania (6.1% of the total population, according to 2011 census) (URL2), it has official status only in those regions, where the percentage of Hungarian population exceeds 20%. In 1996, Romania and Hungary concluded an intergovernmental agreement for a period of ten years, the so-called Basic contract (*Alapszerződés*). According to Article 15 (9), Romania and Hungary shall refrain from any policy or practice with the purpose to assimilate the persons belonging to national minorities against their will and shall protect these persons against any action which aims at such assimilation (URL3).

As well as Transylvania, the Republic of Moldova has always been multi-national. The Russian language usage has a long history in the country, and in some ways, its situation is very similar to that one of Hungarian in Transylvania. After the war of 1812, a part of the former Principality of Moldavia was ceded to the Russian Empire, and the region became known as Bessarabia. The period from 1812 to 1918 was characterized by mass russification and assimilation of the indigenous population. Since more and more Moldovans (especially among intelligentsia) opted to speak Russian or to study in this language, their national identity changed gradually as well. In 1918, Onisifor Ghibu, a Romanian teacher and politician, wrote down in his diary a dialogue he had had with a young woman during a meeting with teachers in Bessarabia. Teacher herself, Moldovan by origin, the woman admitted she “does not want to make herself Moldovan anymore” and that she is “staying Russian”. In his diary, Ghibu commented “All these female teachers... they say if they think in Russian, then they are Russian” (Livizeanu, 1995, p. 101).



After the Great Union of 1918, the central administration pursued a policy of romanization. The usage of the Russian language in Bessarabia was strongly limited. It was forbidden to use any other language than Romanian in public spaces, children were only allowed to speak those foreign languages which were taught in schools (Abakumova-Zabunova, 2005, p. 253). The first official population census in Greater Romania was conducted in 1930. According to the official data, of the total population of Bessarabia, which was 2.846.402 inhabitants, 1.610.757 declared themselves to be Romanians/Moldovans, 351.912 – Russians, while the rest belonged to other ethnic groups such as Bulgarians, Gagauz, Germans, Jews (URL4). The census conducted in 1941 showed a significant decrease of the Russian population to 164.410 people (URL5). This fact, we believe, can be explained by the harsh ethnic policy, which made people declare themselves of another nationality, especially in the case of bilingual persons.

After WW2, the situation changed drastically again. The repeated annexation of Bessarabia by the USSR led to serious changes in the whole Moldovan society. After 1945, a lot of Russian speaking people settled in the country, which contributed to a big number of mixed marriages and emerge of dual national/ethnic identities. The 1970 population census showed that most of the population considered themselves Moldovans – 2.303.916 people, Russian being the third most numerous people in the country – 414.444 people. This number continued to grow, as the results of the censuses conducted in 1979 and 1989 showed: 505.730 and 562.069 people accordingly (URL6).

In the years after the collapse of the USSR, the ethnic and linguistic situation in the independent Moldova was similar to that one in the interwar period. Many countries that at the time of the national renaissance set out to achieve the monolingual nation-country model, i.e., to follow the principle “one country, one people, one language”, are still bi- or multinational, bi- or multilingual (Palágyi 2018, p. 188). On 31 August 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR enacted two laws. One of them made Moldovan the official language and highlighted the linguistic Moldo-Romanian identity. The second law stipulated the return to the Latin Romanian alphabet. In 1989, when Moldova declared a single official language and switched to the Latin script, nationalist politicians and pro-Romanian cultural figures began to refer to Moldovan as the Romanian language.

The new ethnic policy, the possibility of a repeated union of Moldova and Romania encountered Russian-speaking population’s strong disagreement. In September 1989, protests against the central government’s actions took place in the south of the country. Later, this led to an armed conflict in Transnistria. As a result, the number of Russians decreased, since a lot of them fled the country. Children born in interethnic marriages started to opt for Moldovan/Romanian identity, which they find to be closer to the European world. Nowadays, a

significant number of Russian speakers from the Republic of Moldova prefer to call themselves “Russian speaking Moldovans”, underlining the difference in mentality, traditions from the “true” Russians, or even highlighting the unacceptance of Russia’s foreign policy.

### **3. Methodology**

The research is based on analysis of questionnaires conducted in Transylvania and in the Republic of Moldova in February-September 2021. For this study the network approach and the ‘friend of a friend’ technique were used to distribute the questionnaires. Since our goal was to establish the relationship between language use and national identity of bi- and multilinguals, we used the random sampling method, which makes the study sample representative.

In Transylvania the target group were Hungarians living in Oradea (Nagyvárad), Cluj (Kolozsvár), Târgu-Mureş (Marosvásárhely), Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy), Miercurea-Ciuc (Csíkszereda) – cities with a large concentration of Hungarian population. In these cities 48 respondents filled-in the questionnaires. Their age ranges from 21 to 57 years old, on average- from 21 to 35. In Moldova, the focus group were Russian-speaking people living in the capital of the country. There the questionnaires were filled-in by 63 inhabitants of Chişinău since the Moldovan capital is a multinational city, where the Russian languages is used as *lingua franca*. In Chişinău the age of the respondents varies from 23 to 80 years. Most of them (51.63%) were born between 1988 and 1997, when serious changes were taking place in the socio-economic life of the country.

In both cases Google Forms were used to conduct the survey, but in Transylvania questionnaires were handed out as well. The questions were anonymous. For the Transylvanian respondents they were written in Hungarian, for Moldovans– in Russian. Mainly we asked the same questions in Transylvania and in Chişinău. The only question that differs is the one which regards the L2 use. Since in Transylvania the Hungarian language is spoken only by Hungarians, we asked under what circumstances the respondents learned the Romanian language. In the Moldovan capital respondents had to answer how they learned the Russian language, as this language is spoken and even considered as mother tongue by different peoples living in the city. The translated questionnaires and can be found in the Annexes.

At the end, the collected information will be compared to data presented by scientist who study the linguistic situation in Transylvania and to figures provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. This will allow to see what the situation looks like on a larger scale, how the results of this study reflect the official data and try to predict the maintenance of national identities in these regions.

#### 4. The Data

After analysing the questionnaires, we found out that Hungarians from Transylvania get the basis of ethnic identification through language within family. Most of the respondents choose the Hungarian language to communicate with family members. The absolute majority (86%) speaks Hungarian with close relatives (parents, spouse, children), 9.35% use Hungarian and Romanian, 4.65% communicate in Romanian with parents, calling at the same time Hungarian their native language. As a result, 93% of respondents named Hungarian as native language, 7 more percent of respondents consider both languages to be their mother-tongue. The data on the native language of the respondents corresponds to the data on the language spoken by the respondents before starting school - 90.69% spoke Hungarian, 13.95% spoke Hungarian and Romanian, and 1 of the respondents spoke Romanian before the first grade. If the respondents are not married and/or do not have children yet, they mention that in the future they would like to communicate in Hungarian within the family. A similar situation is observed when communicating with friends: only 1 respondent communicates in Romanian, while the overwhelming majority uses Hungarian (62.79%) or both languages (25.58%) for personal communication.

As we could notice from the results of the questionnaires, outside family and friends' community, the Transylvanian Hungarians also try to maintain a strong connection and communicate in their native language. Among themselves, representatives of the Hungarian nationality communicate either in Hungarian (76.74%), or in a mixed way (18.60%). Two respondents communicate in Romanian with other Hungarians. The opposite situation is observed when communicating with people of a different nationality and when addressing strangers: 65.11% speak Romanian with people of another nationality and 69.76%, respectively. When communicating with colleagues, almost 2/3 of the respondents use Hungarian or both languages, another 20.93% speak Romanian at work.

One of the first questions of the questionnaire was "Ethnicity" (*Nemzetiség* in the Hungarian questionnaire, and *Национальность* in the Moldovan one). After processing the data, we found out that 58% of respondents consider themselves to be Hungarians. One of the respondents emphasizes that s/he is Csango by nationality. Despite the big number of people who preserve a Hungarian identity, the percent of those who identify themselves as Romanians, is also big enough and constitutes 30%, while the percentage of people with double identity makes up 9.3%.

Unlike the Hungarian language in Transylvania, the Russian language in Moldova is used by people of different origins, which may cause a shift in national

identity. Currently, despite the outflow of the Russian speaking population and the language policy, the Russian language is still widely used in the country. It is spoken not only by ethnic Russians, but also by Moldovans/Romanians and representatives of other ethnic minorities (Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauz) for whom Russian is dominant or preferred for communication. In Chişinău, we asked 63 people to complete the questionnaire. The number of respondents who consider Russian their native language is 60.1%, which is significantly higher than the percentage (49%) of respondents for whom Moldovan/Romanian<sup>1</sup> is native. 40% of them spoke Russian before going to school, 31.6% spoke Moldovan/Romanian, and another 28.4% spoke other minority languages such as Bulgarian and Ukrainian. A small percentage of respondents (2.9%) noted the fact of switching the language after starting school – from Moldovan/Romanian to Russian.

To communicate with parents, 48.7% of the respondents choose Russian. 58.7% also use Russian to communicate with their spouses, 35.5% speak Moldovan/Romanian and emphasize that they use both languages.

This fact allowed us to assume that in fact the number of bilingual families could be much higher, since 11.6% speak with their children in Moldovan / Romanian and Russian, and the remaining 43.5% speak Russian and other languages (Moldovan/Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian), with other relatives. An even larger number of people (52.2%) use both Moldovan/Romanian and Russian to communicate with friends.

At the same time, many Russian speakers who do not know the official language, identify themselves as Moldovans/Romanians. Even though the Russian language is still widely spoken in the country, the number of respondents with Moldovan/Romanian identity is much higher than that of those who claim to be Russian: 72.5 % vs. 15.5 %. The rest of respondents- 12%- said they are Bulgarians. This can be explained by the fact that these people live compactly in the south of the country (Taraclia County), which helps them preserve their national and cultural identity.

## 5. Conclusions

At present it is not rare for people to have a double identity, which is also the case of some Hungarians living Transylvania and Russian speaking population from the Republic of Moldova. In 2006 a group of researchers conducted a study in Cluj-Napoca and concluded that "... many Transylvanians experience social exclusion

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Constitution, the official language of the country is Moldovan. However, the name of the language is strongly disputed among scholars. Since this question is outside of our competence and both names were indicated by respondents, we will use Moldovan/Romanian to speak about the official language and about the people.

from the 'Hungarian' category in everyday life in Hungary, and they are frequently regarded 'Romanian' by common people" (Veres, 2014, p. 61–86). The same thing often happens to Russian speaking people in Moldova, who say that for Moldovans they are Russians, and for Russians they are Moldovans.

The sociological survey presented in this article allow us to conclude that the opportunity for preserving the ethnic identity is much better in Transylvania than in Moldova, although it was expected to get similar results. This can be explained by the fact that Hungarians in Transylvania live on compact territories, just like before 1920.

Even though the rate of interethnic marriages is high in Transylvania, in certain regions, the number of families that register their kids as "Hungarians" in official documents can be higher than 80% (Kiss, 2009, p. 238). For Bihor County, this number makes 57 %, which almost perfectly matches the result of the present survey– 58%. Another factor that supports the preservation of Hungarian national identity in Transylvania is the cultural collaboration between Romania and Hungary. For example, students from Transylvanian schools and even from Csangó villages have the opportunity to travel to Hungary to improve their language skills and find out more about the Hungarian culture. Also, it is possible for Transylvanians to obtain Hungarian citizenship on a simplified naturalization, which can also influence the national identity of Transylvanians.

Meanwhile, the situation is completely different in Moldova. According to Tishkov, in the early 90's, the Russians who found themselves in diaspora, had three options of life strategy in the new, independent countries: assimilation into the local culture and language, fleeing to Russia, or claiming equal rights and status in the new society (Tishkov, 2007 as cited in Mlechko, 2013, p. 37). Since 2009, the Moldovan government has been promoting the European-Moldovan identity, with which more and more young people identify themselves. The older generation, who was born in the USSR, still feel their connection with Russia and that Russian culture is much closer to them than the European one. This generation still uses the Russian language for everyday communication and tries to preserve Russian traditions. However, the European-Moldovan identity has an increasing impact on the population.

Another key-factor is the low birth rate in Russian families. Among young Russian people surveyed in the late 1990s, only about 4% expressed a desire for their children to be registered as Russian; only 17% would like their children to grow up as people who know the Russian language and culture. The survey conducted in 2007 showed similar results, 8 and 12% respectively (URL7). Very often Russian families opt for studies in Moldovan/Romanian language for their children, which can also result in adopting the Moldovan-European identity. Unlike Hungarians in Transylvania, Russians in Moldova are spread all over the

country, which makes the process of assimilation easier. The last factor, which is an important in understanding the situation, is the separation from the ethnic mass of Russians. Even though there are many Russian organizations, in the past decade less and less cultural events are organized. In the absence of cultural background, Russian children in Moldova learn in schools and in everyday life the history and traditions of Moldova. As a result, they embrace this culture and assimilate into it.

The results of population censuses as well as the results of own questionnaires allows us to predict that in time the Hungarian national identity will be preserved in Transylvania. Not only it is fostered by the local authorities, but there is also a strong desire from the people as well to maintain their language, culture, and identity, which is even more important. At the same time, in Moldova the process of integration of national minorities will only intensify and will possibly lead to assimilation of Russian national identity among Moldovan citizens.

It is planned to continue the research Transylvania and Chişinău in the near future and disseminate more questionnaires to obtain more accurate results. Also, interviews on language attitudes among representatives of the above-mentioned speech communities will be conducted in the same regions. This will give the possibility to better understand the influence on language maintenance and language choice. The results of these researches will be later included in a bigger sociolinguistic study “Russian Language in Moldova vs. Hungarian Language in Transylvania”, where a more detailed description of the linguistic situation of the regions will be provided.

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## Annex 1

### Questionnaire given out in Transylvania

- a. Monogram
- b. Year of birth
- c. Place of birth
- d. Current place of residence
- e. Sex



- f. Nationality
- g. Mother tongue
- h. What language did you speak before you started school?
- i. Did you make a special effort to learn Romanian, or did you learn it in a mother tongue environment?
- j. What language do you speak with your parents?
- k. What language do you speak with your wife/husband?
- l. What language do you speak with your children? \*
- m. What language do you speak with other relatives?
- n. What language do you speak with your colleagues? \*
- o. What language do you speak with your friends?
- p. What language do you speak with people of the same nationality as you?
- q. What language do you speak with people of other nationalities?
- r. What language do you speak in a shop?
- s. What language do you speak to a stranger?
- t. What language do you speak in government departments and agencies?
- u. In what language do you read?
- v. In what language do you watch films?
- w. In what language do you search for information on the Internet?

\* OPTIONAL QUESTION

## **Annex 2**

### **Questionnaire given out in Chişinău**

- a. Monogram
- b. Year of birth
- c. Place of birth
- d. Current place of residence
- e. Sex
- f. Nationality
- g. Mother tongue
- h. What language did you speak before you started school?
- i. Did you make a special effort to learn Russian or did you learn it in a mother tongue environment?
- j. What language do you speak with your parents?
- k. What language do you speak with your wife/husband?
- l. What language do you speak with your children? \*
- m. What language do you speak with other relatives?
- n. What language do you speak with your colleagues? \*
- o. What language do you speak with your friends?
- p. What language do you speak with people of the same nationality as you?
- q. What language do you speak with people of other nationalities?
- r. What language do you speak in a shop?

- s. What language do you speak to a stranger?
- t. What language do you speak in government departments and agencies?
- u. In what language do you read?
- v. In what language do you watch films?
- w. In what language do you search for information on the Internet?

\* OPTIONAL QUESTION

### **Угорська мова як фактор збереження національної ідентичності в Трансільванії в наші дні у порівнянні з російською ідентичністю в Молдові**

**Ана Васильєв**, Аспірант, Університет ім. Лоранда Етвеша; anavasilev7@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-4893-7751.

Мова є одним з основних факторів формування народу та збереження культури. Поряд з іншими факторами, мова є, мабуть, найважливішим чинником створення національної ідентичності – він формує особистість, визначає менталітет, світогляд, поведінку, спосіб життя, систему цінностей та національний характер. Зв'язок між мовою та ідентичністю відіграв важливу роль у національному відродженні в ХІХ столітті в Європі і є надзвичайно актуальним і в наші дні. Цей факт можна пояснити посиленням міграції, політичними процесами та освоєнням другої мови. Особливо це дійсно для країн, які пройшли через територіальні зміни і в яких є природна двомовність. У таких країнах національні або мовні меншини стикаються з зростаючою необхідністю вивчати і використовувати дві або навіть більше мов і зберігати власну мову і, таким чином, культурну та національну ідентичність. Прикладами таких територій можуть бути Закарпаття, Воєводина та Трансільванія. Остання з великим відсотком угорського населення була частиною Румунії у міжвоєнний період та після 1947 році внаслідок Трианонського та Паризького мирних договорів. Іншим прикладом є багатонаціональна Республіка Молдова, яка отримала незалежність від Радянського Союзу 1991 році. Нині дедалі більше людей у Трансільванії та Республіці Молдова стверджують, що вони двомовні. В результаті це призводить до того, що вони ідентифікують себе більш ніж з однією етнічною групою. Що це може означати і як це вплине на культурну різноманітність у цих регіонах? У цьому дослідженні ми представимо коротку теорію на цю тему, а також історичну довідку та результати соціолінгвістичних опитувань, проведених у Трансільванії та Республіці Молдова у лютому-вересні 2021 року. Мета нашого дослідження – вивчити, як використання рідної мови може стати ключовим фактором національної ідентичності та які можливості її збереження у багатомовному середовищі у Трансільванії та Республіці Молдова. Для досягнення поставленої мети ми порівняємо результати анкетування з соціолінгвістичними теоріями про мову та ідентичність. Надалі дослідження буде продовжено, у вищезазначених регіонах буде проведено інтерв'ю на тему ставлення до мови. Результати буде включено до більшого соціолінгвістичного дослідження "Російська

мова в Молдові в порівнянні з угорською мовою в Трансільванії", де буде дано докладніший опис мовної ситуації в Трансільванії та Молдові.

**Ключові слова:** мова, етнічність, ідентичність, збереження, Трансільванія, Республіка Молдова

### **Hungarian Language as a Factor of Identity Preservation in Transylvania Nowadays in Comparison with Russian Identity in Moldova**

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The language is one of the main factors of nation-building and culture preservation. Among other factors, language is perhaps the most important one in creating national identity – it shapes the personality, the mentality, the worldview, the behavior, the lifestyle, the value system and the national character. The relationship between language and identity played an important role in national revival in the XIX century in Europe and is extremely topical in our days. This fact can be explained by intensified migration, political processes and second language acquisition. Especially it is valid for countries that went through consequential territorial changes and where natural bilingualism is present. In such countries, national or linguistic minorities are faced with the growing necessity to learn and use two or even more languages and, at the same time, to preserve their language and, thus, the national identity. Examples of such territories can be Transcarpathia, Vojvodina and Transylvania. The latter with a major percent of Hungarian population, was a part of Romania in the interwar period and since 1947 as a result of Trianon and Paris peace treaties. Another example is the multinational Republic of Moldova, which gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Nowadays more and more people in Transylvania and in the Republic of Moldova claim to be bilingual. This leads to identifying themselves with more than one ethnicity. What would this mean and how would it influence the cultural diversity in these regions? In this study we will present a short theory on the topic as well historical background and the results of sociolinguistic questionnaires conducted in Transylvania and in the Republic of Moldova in February–September 2021. The aim of this research is to examine how mother tongue usage can be a key-factor of national identity and what are the possibilities of its preservation in a multilingual environment in Transylvania and in the Republic of Moldova. To accomplish the goals, we will compare the results of the questionnaires to sociolinguistic theories on language and identity. In the future, the study will be developed, interviews on language attitudes will be conducted in the above-mentioned regions. The results will be included into a bigger sociolinguistic study “Russian Language in Moldova vs. Hungarian Language in Transylvania”, where a more detailed description of the linguistic situation in Transylvania and Moldova will be provided.

**Keywords:** language, ethnicity, identity, preservation, Transylvania, Republic of Moldova

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