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# THE MOLDOVAN DIALECT AND THE LINGUISTIC UNION OF EURASIAN LANGUAGES

Introduction

After the fall of the Russian Empire and at the end of the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, the new Russian Parliament had to face a central problem, namely the imminence of the nationalist revolutions of all non-Russian ethnicities occupied and dominated over centuries by the Tsarist power. In this context, the governors of the Soviet Union decided to promote the national consciousness of non-Russian people by creating not only new republics but also by founding, in these new territories, institutions that had a status similar to those that were built in the frame of the Nation-State[1]. Local cultural elites participated actively in the process of constructing the national consciousness. Local grammars were written (and invented in the cases where they did not already exist), just as cultural journals were edited in order to shape, imaginarily, the national identity of the people. This is how local intellectuals wrote *The grammar of the Moldovan language*[2]. The scope of this intellectual activity was certainly not scientific, it was rather politically ordered. Scientific concepts were transformed into instruments oriented towards political goals, which consisted in building the national identity and the preservation of the geographic borders that defined the past Tsarist Empire.

With this historical description in mind, one can recognize in the local cultural circles of today's Moldova a particular habit, widespread in intellectual debates, of claiming that the Moldovan language is a political invention that dates back, in the

[1] Cf. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and nationalism in Soviet Union (1923-1939)*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2001, p. 1-12.

[2] When making this allegation, we think of Leonid A. Madan's *Граматика лимбий молдовенешть*, ЕГМ, Тирасполя, 1929. But we must specify that this particular grammar book was not the only one published in socialist Moldova. Let us note Gavril Buciuşcanu's *Gramatica limbii moldoveneşti*, published in Balta, Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1925, the Ion D. Cioban's *Gramatica limbii moldoveneşti: Partea întîi (fonetica şi morfologia)*, Tiraspol, Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1939 and finally the grammar book written by Ion Cuşmăunsă entitled *Gramatica limbii moldoveneşti: Partia a doua (sintacsisu)*, Tiraspol, Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1939. In the conclusion of this paper, as we will see, we analyze only Leonid Madan's grammar book not just because this one was adopted as the official one (at the end of the 1920's), but also because its fundamental theses converge with those that we can find in the other grammar books enumerated above.



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history of the Soviet Union, to the end of the 1920's[3]. The logical consequence of such a statement is that the Moldovan language does not exist and that, truthfully, it is merely a dialect of the Romanian language seated in the geographical neighborhood of the other dialects of Romania. This is how Moldovan intellectuals have denounced the political use of the Moldovan language, relying on a comparative analysis of Moldovan and Romanian grammar[4]. Such an approach, positing language as an object of linguistic knowledge, has led to the conclusion that the Moldovan and Romanian languages are in fact identical, and that if any difference is to be found between them, it stems from political coercion in the field of linguistic research, strictly speaking. The goal of our present work is to further this debate-gone-stale all while changing the logic behind the way it unfolds. As such, we intend to analyze not the language as such, but rather the knowledge about the language. It is precisely from this perspective that it becomes possible to analyze in a new light the relationship between the Romanian, Moldovan, and Russian languages. To reach our goal, we will discuss the article by Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike evraaziiskogo iazikovogo soiuza*, and, in the wake of this analysis, we will situate the research of the linguist Mikhail Sergheievskij, who studied the Moldovan language and its relationship with the Russian language towards the end of the 1920's. Our article will proceed through the following steps. We will start off by analyzing the fundamental concepts in Roman Jakobson's article, such as „language union", „phonological correlation", and „structural proximity". In order to better grasp the epistemological status of these concepts, we will then make a detour through the work of Pyotr Savitsky, in which he discusses the relationship between geographical and linguistic studies. Finally, building on the research of Mikhaïl Sergheievskij, we intend to show where the specificity of the connection between the Russian and Moldovan languages lies. This final evaluation will give us the possibility to make a brief comparative analysis between the thesis of Moldovan grammars published during the 1920's of Soviet Moldova and the knowledge about the language that we will discuss in the texts of Roman Jakobson and Mikhail Sergheivskij.

Before starting our analysis, let us specify that we do not intend to reveal a „fundamental" truth about Moldovan language but, from a conceptual and theoretical point of view, our interest is to show the specificity of the links that tied together linguistics research and politics at the end of the second decade of the past century in the history of Soviet Moldova. By doing this, we believe that the critiques of the use of coercion

[3] We have in mind namely the intellectual debates hosted by the Moldovan revue *Contrafort*, available online at www.contrafort.md. One must however note that the relationship between the Moldovan language and Soviet political ideology has been the constant object of study by foreign researchers. Among this research we point especially to the excellent work done by Charles King in his book *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2000.

[4] A good example of this is Donald L. Dyer's article, „What price languages in contact: is there Russian language influence on the syntax of Moldovan?", in *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, 1998, p. 73-86.



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by political ideology in the field of linguistic research may yet be updated. There is no obliged linguistic foundation for the human collective identity. This critical observation, from our point of view, must rest open to a continuous historical research that could help us to understand the actual reasons for the political manipulation of the linguistic knowledge.

1. *Roman Jakobson and the Eurasian language union*

A language family (*iazikovoe semeistvo*) is essentially characterized by a vocabulary, a phonetics, and a grammar based on a matrix shared by several different languages[5]. One of the central terms used to describe a shared origin is that of a „mother language". One must then notice that there is a particular temporality specific to this way of analyzing languages: time, in this case, is necessarily oriented back towards an immemorial past that serves as the origin and the source from which multiple languages were born. Roman Jakobson's approach distinguishes itself from this analytic perspective. For Jakobson, languages are no longer to be analyzed insofar as they belong to the same family, but rather insofar as they find themselves in the same *linguistic union* (*iazikovoi soiuz*)[6]. The central characteristic of a language union is the acquisition of similar aspects (*blagopriobretennie skhodstva*) that we can grasp by comparing the independent structures (*samostoiatelnie*) of neighboring languages (*smejnie*)[7]. By using the term *acquisition* (*blagopriobretennie*), Jakobson shifts the terrain of his analysis away from philology, a „human science" whose knowledge has flourished throughout the modern age, since languages are no longer described as *inheriting* the shared characteristics of a language family, but rather as acquiring, through the modalities we will analyze further on, the specific traits of the union[8].

Such a linguistic union can be established between several languages belonging to different language families. It is of interest to take a closer look at how, in order to go further in his approach and grasp the specificity of a language union, Roman Jakobson invokes a brief comparison with unions made between states (*gosudarstvennie soiuzi*). The state is construction comprised of several levels of differing content and volume,

[5] Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike evraaziiskogo iazykovogo soiuza*, in *Id.*, *Selected Writings*, The Hague-Paris, Mouton, 1971, p. 145.

[6] The Russian word „soiuz" can be translated into the English words „union" and „alliance". We have opted for the term „union" in order to keep the spirit of the comparison made by Jakobson between states and languages (we will explore further on in what sense such a comparison can be made). Let us also remember that the Soviet Union is expressed in Russian as *Sovietskii soiuz*. However, we must also mention that Roman Jakobson also compares the union between languages with military alliances (Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike, op. cit.*, p. 145). This is why the choice between „union" and „alliance" must be made according to the specificity of the contexts in which our analyses take place.

[7] *Ibidem*.

[8] A meticulous analysis of the knowledge specific to philology in the modern *épistémè* has been made by Michel Foucault in *Les mots et les choses*, Gallimard, coll. Tel, Paris, 1990, p. 292-313.



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namely economic, military and political ones. A union between states can either be made at one of these levels, or at multiple, heterogeneous levels at the same time[9]. We note that a single state, from this analytical perspective, can be part of an economic union with certain states, all while belonging to a military union with others[10]. This can give way to a complex web of relations between the states, one that is structured on several heterogeneous levels and must be meticulously described in order to better understand the position that a particular state holds in a specific geographic area.

As with states, languages are structured by a multiplicity of systems, the three main groups of which can be classified into the study of the sounds associated to a language (phonetics), a register in which we can describe the structures of propositions and their articulation with each other (syntax), and finally a system of vocabulary and the particular ways in which words transform (morphology). Each of these three levels constitutes a *closed heterogeneous system* (*zamknutie sistemy*)[11]. A language is thus a system of systems[12]. One and the same language can enter into an alliance with one or several other languages on either one or more levels of these systems. This is how a complex „structural proximity" (*strukturalinaia blizosti*[13]) can be established between languages, since they can converge on a multiplicity of heterogeneous levels[14].

This comparison shows us clearly that Jakobson is applying a political metaphor to the field of linguistic analysis[15]. Later on, we will see that the truly linguistic analysis of the ways in which languages enter into contact with each other, all while reciprocally influencing each other, contains specificities that are impossible to reduce to the category of strictly political affairs.

[9] Roman Jakobson*, K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

[10] *Ibidem*.

[11] «Vse eto *zamknutie sistemi*, razlichnie plani edinnogo iazika», *Ibidem* (our emphasis).

[12] «Iazik – sistema sistem», *Ibidem*.

[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] It is important to mention that the concept of structure is, in the jakobsonian terminology, closely linked to the notion of *totality*, fact that makes Jakobson's conception about language different from that proposed by Saussure. Cf. Patrick Sériot, *Structure et totalité. Les origines intellectuelles du structuralisme en Europe centrale et orientale*, Lambert-Lucas, Limoges, 2012, p. 13-27. The concept of totality will be discussed later on.

[15] Nikolaï Troubetzkoy was, together with Roman Jakobson, another influent linguist who strongly believed in the political vocation of linguistics. Patrick Sériot discusses the complexity of their works in link with politics in different places: Patrick Sériot, „Des éléments systémiques qui sautent les barrières des systèmes", in Patrick Sériot et Françoise Gadet (éds.), *Jakobson entre l'Est et l'Ouest, 1915-1939*, Cahiers de l'ILSL, Nr. 9, 1997, p. 213-236; *Id.*, „De la géolinguistique à la géopolitique: Jakobson et la langue moldave", in *Probleme de lingvistică generală şi romanica*, vol 1, 2003, Chişinău, p. 248-261. In his critical investigation, Patrick Sériot makes it clear at what point the ideological belief in the *natural* unity of Eurasia guided the linguistic research of Jakobson and Troubetzkoy. It is crucial to keep this critique in mind in order to understand the profound contradictions that underline Jakobson's and Toubetzkoy's research in linguistics in the historical context that interests us in this article.



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Our focus must now turn to one central question. As we stated while analyzing the concept of a „language union", a language is a *closed* system of systems, such as the phonetic, morphological and syntactic registers. What's important from this perspective is to be able to analyze the articulation between these closed systems within a specific language and between several languages belonging to different language families. How do languages acquire similar characteristics if the systems that define them are *closed* ones? Through what channels do languages influence each other? What makes this question all the more difficult is that it refers to another essential concept of the „spirit of the time" that Jakobson was writing in, that of „the place of development", which, as we will see further on, comprises several socio-economic and geographic levels. This, in turn, place the linguistic analysis on a highly over-determined conceptual level. We must note before answering this question that Eurasia is a political and geographic area extremely rich in profoundly heterogeneous languages. On the far east side, there is a whole range of Chinese, Japanese and Russian dialects. On the far west side, there is a whole range of Romance languages (different Moldovan and Romanian dialects) as well as Slavic and Turkish languages. Few places on Earth offer such linguistic wealth for an analysis of the specificities of a language union.

In order to analyze the similarity and thus the systematic proximity between two or more languages, one must analyze each phonetic, syntactic and morphological element of a given language. We must insist that it is only by way of an immanent description of each level that we will be able to grasp the union between languages[16]. This is to say that it is impossible to deduce, from the structure of a given language, the structural specificities of other languages. But that is not all. As we have already stated, a language understood as a system of systems is not an entity that can be abstracted from the context in which it lies. Roman Jakobson appeals here to one of the fundamental theses of Marxism, that of *totality*[17]. The exact name that he gives to this thesis is „place of development" (*mestorazvitie*[18]). The urgent task of linguistic science back when Jakobson was writing was to find the laws that govern the appearance of similarities between different languages, paying attention to the places in which these languages developed. The method behind this type of linguistics was baptized by Jakobson as the „linking method"[19]. How can we adhere to such a method while paying attention

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[17] Cf. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Une philosophie marxiste du langage*, Paris, PUF, 2004, especially the sixth chapter and Patrick Sériot, *Structure et totalité*, *op. cit.*, especially p. 282-289.

[18] The Ruassian words *mestorazvitie* is comprised of two terms, *mesto* and *razvitie*. The substantive *mesto* means „place"; the substantive *razvitie* means „development". We will discuss the meaning of this central concept in greater detail further on.

[19] „The task of science is to grasp the links between the different levels [of a language] and, thusly, describe the law that governs the appearance of these links. Let us call this approach the linking method (*metodom uviazki*) […]", Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 146. For an analysis of the „linking method" in Jakobson's works, see Patrick Sériot, *Structure et totalité*, *op. cit*., especially p. 211-219.



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to a language's place of development? The development place of a language is what constitutes the unity (*slivaiushee v edinnoe tzeloe*) of the socio-historical and territorial dimensions of one or more countries[20]. Roman Jakobson spends no more time analyzing this term fundamental to his descriptions. Nonetheless, it can be found in the work of his colleagues at the Linguistic Circle of Prague. As such, we will make a detour through the analysis of an important article penned by Pyotr N. Savitsky in which he discusses languages' „place of development"[21].

2. *Pyotr Savitsky and linguistic geography*

A language's place of development is made up of geographic areas and surfaces. The study of geographic areas focuses on soil[22], climate and botanical diversity to be found in a given area. The specificity of a linguistic approach to the description of languages' places of development is that it does not analyze isolated units as indivisible totalities, such as a given dialect, but rather decomposes them into specific layers (vocabulary, phonology, morphology, etc.) by looking to understand their particularities *in relation to* geographical areas. It is thus of great importance to be able to describe the way in which a „cultural stratum" (in this case, languages) is related to its geographical determinations[23]. Savitsky called the different strata of a language its „characteristics" and he defined his scientific goals as describing the way in which these characteristics change when their geographic area changes. As A. Dauzat put it, „the limit of the diphthong *oi* in *étoile* [star] does not correspond exactly to that in *toile* [canvas, web] nor that in *mois* [month], and the *c (k)* does not have the same geographical area in *canta(r), canter* (to sing), in *vaco, vaque* (cow) or in *caussar*, *causser* (to put on shoes), between Southern and Northern France"[24].

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 147. The expression *slivaiushee v edinnoe tzeloe* used by Jakobson literally means „merging into a single totality". The term *tzeloe* means „entirety" or „totality", as opposed to the terms „part" or „peice".

[21] For a rich analysis concerning the complexity of the influences that link the works of Jakobson, Savitsky and Troubetzkoy, we will read Patrick Sériot, *Structure et totalité*, *op. cit*. (especially the 8th chapter where the author discusses the concept of „place of development").

[22] One of the prominent representatives of pedology, or soil science, in the first couple decades of the twentieth century in the USSR was Lev Berg (1876-1950). When Roman Jakobson uses the term *mestorazvitie*, he is referring to, among others, the work of L. Berg. We are limiting our analysis here to the central theses of P. N. Savitsky because he was one of the first intellectuals in the USSR to study the relationship between geographical areas and language development.

[23] It is interesting to note here that the Russian term „*mestorazvitie*" can be understood in two ways: it means both a place of development (of languages, for example) and the development of a place. The *mestorazvitie* thus makes up a totality signifying the place where cultural items are developed and, at the same time, this place is something that itself develops following a socio-historical temporality. Let us remember that when using this term, Roman Jakobson states that the *mestorazvitie* was that which brings into a single unit (*slivaiushie v edinnoe tzeloe*) the socio-historical dimensions and territories of one or more countries (Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 147).

[24] Quoted in Pyotr N. Savitsky, „Les problèmes de la géographie linguistique du point de vue du géographe", in *Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague*, Nr. 1, 1929, p. 145.



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However, the analysis of „areas" is not limited to the description of links that can be established between a characteristic and a geographic zone, but at the same time tries to show the links between different characteristics that cover the same geographic region. In other words, the goal of linguistic geography is to also grasp the blending of different characteristics that come from one or more languages[25]. The theoretical-practical construction that such an approach aims at can only be achieved by way of a rigorous comparative study of theses specific to general geography and those discovered by linguistic geography. It is necessary, however, when forging a passage between these two levels, to provide the most meticulous description possible „of the typology of linguistic networks formed by isolated characteristics"[26]. This intermediary level is certainly that in which lies the approach developed by Roman Jakobson in his article *K kharakteristike evraaziiskogo iazikovogo soiuza*, but the task remains to describe the particularity of geographical areas in order to better understand the particularity of Jakobson's analyses.

In broad strokes, P. Savitsky draws a border between the Northwest and the Southeast of the former Soviet Union as well as the former Russian Empire. This limit is defined by several characteristics, ranging from economic, climate and linguistic features. In Pyotr Savitsky's work, these characteristics are dealt with rather briefly. We will only mention them here before moving on to the deeper analysis of linguistic characteristics made by R. Jakobson.

From an economic perspective, there are especially two characteristics that need to be mentioned. The first is that in Russia's Southeast (at least up until 1916), the percentage of peasant farms organized around perfected working capital was over 49.5% (a number calculated by Savitsky which weighed these farms against the total number of active peasant farms at the time). The situation in the Northwest was different: the government did not manage to reach the same level of economic performance[27]. The second economic characteristic has to do with agricultural practices. More precisely, the Southeast was characterized by pig farming and wintertime wheat farming, whereas the Northwest lacked wintertime wheat farming, and favored sheep farming[28].

The third characteristic is related to the climate. The Southeast was characterized by an average January temperature of more than – 8 degrees Celsius (17.6°F) and by the thawing of rivers and streams prior to April 11th, whereas in the Northwest the average January temperature never rose over – 8 degrees, and the river and streams would not thaw before around April 11th[29].

These descriptions are important insofar as they show they *tendencies* that divide the different regions of a country. It must be acknowledged that between the two poles

[25] „The clarification of the *analytic foundation* of area distribution certainly does not lose sight of the *synthetic* goals. One of these goals is the *demarcation of areas specific to several characteristics. The notion of dialect must be interpreted in the sense of a linguistic area pertaining to several characteristics*" (*Ibidem*).

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[27] *Ibidem*.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 148-149.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 149-150.



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of the country, the South and the North, there exists a gradation of temperature, a variety of agricultural and livestock farming practices, as well as a variance in economic growth statistics. The further North we go, the colder it gets, and, at the same time, economic and farming activities change. This is how the tendencies that make up the totality that is the *mestorazvitie*, the place of development, are described. From the perspective of an analysis of these *mestorazvitie* tendencies, the description of languages no longer has to look for a common *origin* of languages, such as a mother language that would give birth to a series of diverse dialects. One must rather look for the tendencies inherent to a language's life, that which directs them towards a specific goal. In his article *K kharakeristike evraaziiskogo iazikovogo soiuza*, Roman Jakobson stated that, unlike the old way of analyzing languages as sharing a single *origin* (*edinnorodnnie*), the new linguistics must be able to analyze languages as sharing a single *tendency* (*edinnoustremlennie*)[30]. We can thus see the influence that the work of Pyotr Savitsky had on Jakobson's analyses. But we still must describe the ways in which, according to Savitsky, languages are configured with relation to their geographic areas in order to better understand how Jakobson intended to unfold his own linguistic analyses.

The polarization of the geographic area into the North and the South fits with linguistic regularities. We can thus observe „a) the softening of *k* following *č* and b) the softening of *k* after a soft consonant (the first limit goes from Youkhnov, under Smolensk governance, to Nijnétchirskaïa on the Don, the second one goes from the same Youkhnov to Novocherkassk"[31]. In the same way, it is interesting to point out that, with Savitsky, that the soft *r* is found more frequently in the Southwest than in the Northwest[32]. This is to show that the increase in winter temperature is variable and it corresponds to linguistic modifications. From this perspective, one must notice that Belarusian dialects share similarities with Little-Russian dialects in geographic zones where the average January temperature is greater than – 8 degrees Celsius[33]. Let us observe the specificity of such a linguistic approach: it aspires to grasp the tendencies, the general lines of a specific orientation that structure climate variation, and, by doing so, connects them with the tendencies inherent to languages' „lives". The rise in winter temperature corresponds to the softening or hardening of certain consonants. It is extremely interesting to observe that Savitsky uses the same terms as Jakobson to describe linguistic and climate-related regularities. Pyotr Savitsky indeed states that „what is remarkable is the *union*, in the region defined by its January temperatures, between Little-Russian dialects and precisely those southern Belarusian dialects. To the homogeneity of the place of development (according to the characteristic in question) corresponds a particular kinship between these two groups"[34].

The key terms used by Savitsky in this passage are „union" and „place of development". We can indeed see the correspondence between the place of development

[30] Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

[31] Pyotr N. Savitsky, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

[32] *Ibidem*.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 150. Note that the Russian groups is made up of three dialects: in the East, „Great Russian" (the official language of the former Russian Empire); in the Southwest people speak „Little Russian" (which corresponds to Ukrainian); finally, people in the Northwest speak „Belarusian".

[34] *Ibidem* (our emphasis).



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and the language union. But we must specify right away, as we have already done, that such a relationship must not be established between the specificities of geographic areas and dialects insofar as the latter constitute indivisible totalities. More precisely, what must be grasped is the link between the characteristics of a dialect and its geographic zone. This is the angle by which the *union* between languages can be described. Moreover, one must not reduce the modifications intrinsic to linguistic movements, strictly speaking, to climate changes. The role played by the economy, as we briefly saw, is no lesser than that of the climate in historical metamorphoses of languages. As such, only a multi-faceted approach will allow us to grasp the unity of a socio-historical whole within which different changes take place.

One of the central questions we came across in our reading of Roman Jakobson's article *K kharakteristike evraaziiskogo iazikovogo soiuza* concerned the possibility of changes emerging from within languages. We can now see that such changes are greatly over-determined and that, in order to describe them adequately, we must rely on an approach that tackles multiple levels of analysis. Roman Jakobson based his linguistic approach on the research already done by Savitsky. He keeps the same geographic division of languages and, from this, meticulously analyses the correlation that can be established between the different sound-layers of several languages.

Following Roman Jakobson's approach, in the wake of the descriptions developed by P. N. Savitsky in his work on languages, let us go back to the important idea that sprung from our earlier analyses. It was indeed important for Savitsky to rigorously examine the *isolated* characteristics of languages and, by doing so, establish the links that unify languages. Of course, Savitsky did not describe the language unions in all of their changing complexity, but we can already make out the sketches of a key idea: not only do the characteristics have to be linked with climate tendencies of a certain geographic area, but, on top of this, they must be grasped in their irreducible singularity. Roman Jakobson would in turn insist on this observation to highlight the idea according to which it is not so much inter-language influence that needs to be described, but rather, and more precisely, the function that inter-language influence plays in the all of the systems that, together, make up a language[35]. To do this, Jakobson focuses all of his analyses on the places occupied by the characteristics of a language and the correlations established between them. We will follow Jakobson in this direction by putting on hold for awhile the empirical research done by Savitsky. As we will see later on, the issue of inter-language influence remains open, as Jakobson's research focuses essentially on the synchronic level of languages' „lives", and the question of the production of influence and the emergence of changes in a language's structure is never properly addressed.

[35] „The important thing is not the influence as such, but its function (*evo funktsia*) from the perspective of a linguistic system that produces an influence", Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.



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3. *Phonological correlation between languages*

In order to proceed in our approach, it is wise to start off by defining the term „correlation" before moving on to analyze some of the precise examples of correlation discussed in Roman Jakobson's work.

> A phonological correlation consists of a series of binary oppositions defined by a common principle which can be thought of independently of each couple of opposite terms. Comparative phonology must formulate general laws that govern the relations of correlation in the framework of a given phonological system[36].

We have seen that the language union, insofar as it differs from a language family, is a system of links that can be described between a language's different strata. The term „correlation" brings an additional aspect to this definition by specifying which binary oppositions in a language are to be described in the sound dimension. By describing binary oppositions *within* a language, we will analyze their *places* and *functions* within a language system.

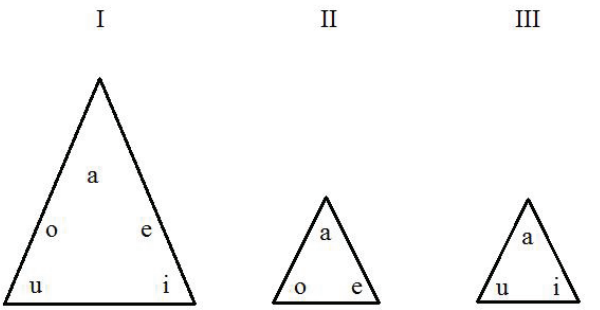
While a sound in a given language can be similar to a sound in a different language, the functions of these sounds can be different within the system that defines each language. An analysis of correlations as binary oppositions in a given phonological system must be done with reference to an analysis of the functions occupied by the sounds in the system. What is the specificity of sounds analyzed in a given phonological system? This leads us to the description of phonemes. A phoneme is the minimal unit of sound that is immediately linked to a word's meaning. By changing a phoneme, a word's meaning is simultaneously changed. In the French word *chat* (cat), the *ch* sound constitutes a phoneme. We can easily observe that by replacing it with the sound *r* (thus making the word *rat* [rat]), the word's meaning changes as well. Let us take another example in order to better understand the role of phonemes in a language system and the correlations between them. In the Russian language, the *e* varies, according to whether it comes before a hard or a soft consonant. In the word *eti*, the *e* is pronounced with a certain closed voice, while in the word *etot* the same phoneme is pronounced with a certain open voice. So, in Russian, the open *e* and the closed *e* represent two variants of the same sound, depending on the (hard or soft) consonant it precedes. In French, the open *e* and the closed *e* can make a distinction between different meanings of words, and thus has a different function than the one it occupies in Russian. If we take, for example, the French words *dé* (die, as in dice) and *lé* (the width of a piece of fabric), we can observe that the *e* is pronounced with a certain closed voice. In the words *lait* (milk) and *dais* (canopy), the *e* is pronounced with a certain openness of the voice. In these cases, not only do the closed *e* and the open *e* vary quantitatively, but, by way of that, they change the meanings of the words. We are thus dealing with a different function and, furthermore, two

[36] Roman Jakobson, „Proposition au Premier Congrès International de Linguistes. Quelles sont les méthodes les mieux appropriées à un exposé complet et pratique de la phonologie d'une langue quelconque?", in *Id.*, Selected Writings, *op. cit.*, p. 3.



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different phonemes[37]. As we have stated, phonemes occupy different functions in a given system. This means that they are not simply a pile of sounds randomly roped together in a language[38]. Let us take a look at a diagram used by Roman Jakobson to describe a series of different types of positions that phonemes can take in several different languages[39].




This diagram shows three different languages, marked by the labels I, II and II. Note that languages I and II both contain the phonemes *o* and *e*. But these phonemes occupy different positions in the two languages: in system I, they are in the middle, whereas in system II they are at the bottom. We thus have two different phonetic systems because, even though they contain the same phonemes, the functions of these phonemes are structured differently in the two systems. Now if we compare languages II and III, we observe that they are very close to each other: they are both composed of three phonemes structured similarly. The only difference is that in language II, the base is made up of the phonemes *o* and *e*, while in language III the phonemes *u* and *i* occupy the base.

Our description of phonological systems allows us to understand that, in order to compare the composition of two languages, it is not enough to analyze the phonemes as such, but rather the positions they hold within a given system. This is the only way to reach an adequate description of phonological correlations[40] Let us look at some precise examples of phonological correlations in order to analyze, in the wake of these examples, the structural proximity of the Russian and Moldovan languages. This will require two distinct steps. We will first show how Roman Jakobson came to identify, from the perspective of structural analysis, the union between Russian and Moldovan in order to then, in a second step, further Jakobson's analyses with the field research done by Mikhail Sergheievskij.

A correlation between sounds can be established on the basis of three types: a) *quantitative correlation* (*kolichestvennaia korelatsia*), b) *dynamic correlation* (*dinamicheskaia korelatsia*), and c) *melodic* (or polytonic) *correlation*[41].

[37] Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 150-151.

[38] „The understanding of a phonological system as a fortuitous aggregate of elements must be discarded" (Roman Jakobson, „Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe comparée à celles des autres langues slaves", in *Id.*, Selected Writings, *op. cit.*, p. 22).

[39] This diagram is found in Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[41] *Ibidem*.



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*A)* A quantitative correlation is to be found in several languages: Czech, Serbian, Latin, and ancient Greek. More precisely, the quantitative phonological correlation indicates a binary opposition between vowels. In the languages mentioned above, the vowels are opposed between long and short sounds. In the Serbian language, Jakobson remarks, there is a whole series of binary oppositions: the (short) *a* is set against the (long) *ā*, the *o* against the *ō*, the *u* against the *ū*, the *e* against the *ē*, and finally the *i* against the *ī*. It must be specified, however, that, according to Jakobson's definition of the concept of correlation, the very principle of correlation is not exhausted in a specific binary opposition. The correlation is supposed to be understood on a transcendental level that is not to be confused with the empirical illustrations of the correlations[42].

*B)* The dynamic (or intensive) correlation is a correlation between accented and unaccented vowels. If we take Russian as an example, as does Roman Jakobson, we have the following binary oppositions: *a – à*, *u – ù*, and finally *i – ì*[43].

*C)* If, by raising the voice's pitch in different direction in a given language helps speakers to distinguish between several meanings (*znachenia*) of a word, this indicates that the language is a polytonic one (*politonicheskij iazik*)[44]. The absence of this characteristic indicates that the language is monotonic.

A couple precise examples can help us better understand the concept of polytonality. Let us first note that, from a geographical perspective, polytonality is found in the area around the Pacific Ocean. In this geographical area several language unions are formed: Tibetan (like Chinese, Burmese, and Thai), Malaysian, Japanese, etc. The linguistic trait of polytonality is also found in the central Africa and Latin America[45]. Finally, it can be found in the geographic area that corresponds to the Baltic languages. Polytonality is found neither in Eurasia nor in Europe (except the Baltics). It is only in the periphery regions of Eurasia, in the Baltics, and in neighborhood surrounding the Pacific Ocean that polytonality is an aspect that structures language unions.

If we take the example of the word „brūt" from a North German Baltic dialect, we can observe that by raising the voice's pitch when pronouncing the first syllable, we get the word „boil", whereas by decreasing this pitch we get the word „fiancé/ engaged". In the same way, the Lithuanian word „suditi", if we raise the voice's pitch while pronouncing the first syllable, we get the word „to judge", whereas if we decrease the pitch, we get „to salt". In both of these cases, changing the pitch of one's voice changes the meaning of the word[46]. This is why we can call these languages polytonic.

As we have already stated, Eurasian languages are not polytonic. The question that this raises is what makes these languages different from other monotonic languages found in neighboring geographic areas, such as Central Europe. The distinctive characteristic of Eurasian languages, besides the fact that they are not polytonic, is the

[42] *Ibidem*.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 156 (refer to note 8).
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 157.
[46] Cf. *Ibidem.*



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softening of consonants[47]. We will now analyze this characteristic by taking the example Russian, in order to then show the structural proximity between the Russian and Moldovan languages.

The phonological framework of Russian is organized along the following correlations: „1. Voiced/voiceless consonants. 2. Soft/hard consonants. 3. Stressed/unstressed vowels"[48].

In the case of the Great-Russian dialect, there are twelve consonant phonemes to which correspond twelve other opposed phonemes. The opposition lies in the hardness and softness of the consonants. So we have the following correlation between the hard phonemes *r*, *l*, *n*, *m*, *d*, *t*, *z*, *s*, *b*, *p*, *v*, *f* and the soft ones *ri*, *li*, *ni*, *mi*, *di*, *ti*, *zi*, *si*, *bi*, *pi*, *vi*, *fi*[49]. Let us look at a couple examples of words whose meaning changes according to the soft or hard consonant used. In Russian, the word *rov* means *ditch* or *trench*, whereas the word *riov* means *howl* or *shriek*. In the same way, we can distinguish between the word *ves*, which means *weight*, and the word *vesi*, which means *all*.

This type of correlation established between hard and soft consonants is found in the entire eastern geographical area of Eurasia, as well as to the East of the western Eurasian zones, where we can find the examples of Ukrainian and Bulgarian[50]. However, it is important to note, as does Roman Jakobson, that the correlation between hard and soft consonants is also found in the group of Romanian languages, more specifically in the Moldovan dialects found in this group. While specifying that French and Italian have no such correlation, Jakobson insists that „it is only the Romanian group – the western island of the world of Romance languages – where we find the softening of consonants. The eastern zone of this island is occupied by the Moldovan language. The Carpathian Mountains are the western border of the Moldovan language, the geographical zone held by the Moldovan Soviet Republic being the western part of the Moldovan language"[51].

Using the concepts forged by Roman Jakobson, we note that the Moldovan dialects join a language union with the languages of Eurasia. The phonological correlation demonstrated in the Moldovan dialect must be carefully disentangled from a „genetic" analysis of languages in order not to describe the resemblance between the sounds of this dialect with those of Russian as if this resemblance was a symptom of them stemming from a shared origin, such as a mother language[52]. On the contrary, Roman Jakobson is pointing out that the relation between Moldovan and Russian is one of *structural proximity*. How can we understand the specificity of this closeness between Russian

[47] Cf. Patrick Sériot, *Structure et totalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 91-92.

[48] Roman Jakobson, „Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe…", *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[49] Roman Jakobson, *K kharakteristike*, *op. cit*., p. 159.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 168. To anchor this observation, Roman Jakobson relies on the work of Mikhaïl Sergheievskij that we will analyze while paying close attention to their underlying conceptual apparatus.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 156.



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and Moldovan? To answer this question we must turn to the work of Mikhaïl Sergheievskij, which will allow us, as we did above with the work of Savitksy and Jakobson, to show the relation between Moldovan geography and the knowledge about the Moldovan language.

4. *Mikhaïl Sergheievskij and the knowledge about the Moldovan language*

Mikhaïl Sergheievskij had started his research on the Moldovan language and its relation to the Russian language in 1925, one year following the creation of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. It was published ten years later, after three field expeditions in 1928, 1929, and 1930[53]. It is especially interesting to observe the method Sergheievskij used in his empirical research, which consisted in drawing links between the Moldovan language and the geographic region that it called home. The author specifies that a study of the Moldovan language must be done in a complex (*v komplekse*) of geographic elements[54]. In this working perspective, the important thing is to be able to grasp the linkage (*uviazka*) between these heterogeneous elements and languages' development[55]. We can see how deeply Sergheievskij's research is rooted in the spirit of his time! As we saw with the work of Roman Jakobson and Pyotr Savitsky from the 1920's and 1930's, the geographic dimension is of capital importance for understanding the specificity of language structures. The language knowledge inherent to Sergheievskij's analyses is deeply embedded in this „epistemological ground". It is important to carefully describe such a ground in order to understand the extent to which he goes beyond the configuration of the *épistémè* of that era that we have previously examined. To accomplish this, we will undertake a two-step procedure. First, we will make a detour through the work of Lev Berg in which he describes the geography of Moldova[56]. In the light of this investigation we will be able to describe, in a second step, the relation between the Moldovan language, as it is analyzed by Sergheievskij, and its geographic region.

From the viewpoint of soil and forest zones, Moldova can be split up into three regions: the North, the South and the middle. The North and the middle of the country are characterized by a massive presence of forests and *tchernoziom* soil, rich in humus, whose depth reaches about 110 centimeters. The South is characterized by the prevalence of steppes and *tchernoziom* soil, rich in humus, who average depth reaches about 90 centimeters[57]. It is interesting to point out that when describing the relation between the North and the South, Lev Berg insists on the idea that there is a gradation between the two poles[58]. Going from one cardinal pole to the other, the forests become less frequent following a drop in the landscape's elevation: while, in the North, the hills reach about 450 meters, in the South they only get up to around 200 meters. So, Moldovan

[53] Mikhaïl V. Sergheievskij, *Молдавские этюды*, Академиа Наук СССР, Moscow, 1936.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 7 and 11.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[56] Lev Berg, *Бессарабия. Страна-Люди-Хозяйство*, Петроградъ, Ogni, 1918.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 12.



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geography is split into two regions: not only does the South set itself apart from the North in terms of hill elevation, but this gradation influences the presence of forests in the country's two regions[59]. Berg notes that it is remarkable that the quantity of rain also varies between the North and the South[60]. The South's climate is indeed dryer than that of the North[61]. The geographic dimensions of a country thus form a cracked totality crisscrossed with tendencies that we can describe depending on whether we focus on the North or the South[62].

By comparing the geographic zone of Moldova with that of Russia as Savitsky undertook to do in his work presented above, we cannot but notice that Moldova, if we take the average January temperature as our benchmark, is homogeneous with the climate in the South of Russia. Indeed, the January temperatures run between – 4 degrees in the North and – 2 degrees in the South of Moldova. In July as well, there is hardly a temperature difference between the two poles, as they vary between 21 degrees in the North and 23 degrees in the South[63].

When describing the specificity of the agriculture commonly found in the region of Moldova, Lev Berg meticulously analyzed the quantity of grains harvested there. His tables show that, as Savitsky had already observed, grains produced in Moldova are the same as those generally produced in the South of Russia. So, the homogeneity of this place of development that is characteristic of Moldova's geographic area should, according to the logic behind linguistic geography, correspond to a homogeneity in the structure of Moldovan and Little-Russian languages. Indeed, Roman Jakobson had already noticed that in Moldovan, just as in the Russian language in general, there is a softening of consonants. It is from this narrow viewpoint that we can admit that there exists a correspondence between the homogeneity of the Russian and Moldovan languages on the one side, and the homogeneity of the geographic zones of Moldova and South Russia on the other. Let us continue in our approach by deepening the analysis of the knowledge about the language in order to justify the assertion that Russian and Moldovan have a structural relation. For this, we will move on to the linguistic research of the Russian Mikhaïl Sergheievskij.

Sergheievskij points out that from the perspective of language analysis, the Moldovan territory can be divided into two distinct regions, the North and the South, even though they remain close to each other. The dialect of northern Moldova is characterized by the presence of whistled vowels (*miagkie svistiashie*[64]), whereas the South's dialect

[59] „The forests of Bessarabia are acclimated to elevated regions: if we draw the heights of hills on a map, we notice that those that surpass 250 meters correspond to the regions containing forests", *Ibid.*, p. 13 (our translation).

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[64] Mikhaïl Sergheievskij, *Молдавские этюды*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.



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is characterized by the presence of whispered vowels (*miagkie shipiashie*[65]). According to Sergheievskij, it is precisely this distinction that singles out, more than any other, Moldovan dialects from other Romanian dialects[66]. But this is not the only characteristic that lends Moldovan its specificity. To refine his descriptions of the Moldovan dialect, Sergheievskij splits them into two fields: vocalism and consonantism.

1) In the realm of vocalism, there are especially three facts that must be pointed out. First of all, the vowel *e* changes into an *i* when it is preceded by a consonant: while in Romanian the word „dinte" (tooth) is pronounced with an *e* at the end, in Moldovan the vowel *e* transforms into an *i*, giving us the word „dinti". The second trait of the Moldovan dialect is that the diphthong *ea*, when preceded by a consonant, changes into the vowel *e*. This gives us the Moldovan word *ste* (star) instead of the Romanian word *stea*, or the pronoun *me* (my) instead of *mea*. Finally, the third characteristic is that the vowel *o*, when followed by a consonant, becomes a *u*: thus the Romanian word pronounced *opt* (eight) is pronounced *upt* in Moldovan[67].

2) In the realm of consonantism, two characteristics need to draw our attention above all. It is important to describe them not only to grasp the singularity of the Moldovan dialect with respect to other Romanian dialects, but also to grasp its structural proximity to the Russian language. Moldovan is characterized, first of all, by the softening of the consonants *p*, *b*, *f*, *v* and *m* when they stand in front of the vowels *i* and *î*. The consequence of such a change is that in the Moldovan dialect we end up with five soft consonants that are paired up against five hard consonants. Let us take an example analyzed by Sergheievskij: the Romanian word *piatră* (stone) is pronounced as *kiatră* in Moldovan. The hard labial consonant *p* found in the Romanian word *piatră* softens in the Moldovan dialect into the soft palatal consonant *ki*[68]. The second characteristic is more complex. It lies in the hardening of the consonants *s* and *z*, which, in Moldovan, are pronounced *tz* and *ts*. So the Romanian word *ziua* (day) en pronounced *dziua* in Moldovan. However, these two consonants, when pronounced, either by a whisper or a whistle, in the North and South of Moldova, respectively[69].

Mikhaïl Sergheievskij observes that the softening of consonants in the Moldovan dialect is no different from the softening of consonants in the Russian language, which sets the Moldovan dialect apart from the Romanian language. One might ask: how is it possible to Russian and Moldovan to acquire such shared characteristics? It would sure be difficult, or even impossible, to locate a single cause behind the transformations that take place in a language's history. Indeed, neither Mikhaïl Sergheievskij nor Roman Jakobson describe, in their analyses, the power of one causal force to bring about

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 12 et 18.

[67] *Ibidem*.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 13. The hard consonant *v* also softens when placed before the vowel *u*. So the *v* in the Romanian word *vulpe* (fox) is pronounced in Moldovan as an *h*, giving us the word *hulpi* (*Ibidem*).

[69] *Ibidem*.



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a multiplicity of changes both within languages and in the relations held between them. One must rather describe a plurality of heterogeneous determining factors that produce, in their complex interplay, specific effects, such as that which preoccupies us presently, namely the similarity between the softening of consonants in the Russian and Moldovan languages.

One of the central specificities in our approach is that we aim to describe the modality according to which Jakobson's linguistics, and, in the wake of these, the work of Mikhaïl Sergheievskij, problematizes its object of study. What is important to describe here are the terms inherent to the knowledge about the language. From this perspective, we are not looking to test the scientific pertinence of the linguistic knowledge, but rather we are aiming to grasp the conceptual thread from which this knowledge of the language was produced. So, by asking the question of the causal force that could have had to strength to bring about changes in this specific space that is a language, our intention was not to show that Jakobson and Sergheievskij's work contains the foundation of all knowledge about language, but rather that the concepts inherent to their work are out of sync with the conceptual debate over the scientific falsity of the Moldovan language's status. In this debate, the language is the central object of analysis. From our working perspective, we were able to move beyond this analytic framework by examining not the language in itself as an object of knowledge, but rather the knowledge about the language.

Conclusion

What are the conclusions that come to light following this conceptual analysis? First of all, it is important to make it clear that neither the research of Roman Jakobson, nor those developed by Mikhail Sergheievskij are politically neutral in the social and historical context in which they had written their works. By forging the concept of the linguistic union, Jakobson intended to achieve political goals which are in profound contradiction with scientific research detached from ideological manipulation of concepts. Secondly, one must observe that some of the concepts that we analyzed in the Jakobson's writings rely on a different theoretical background than the thesis in which the Moldovan grammar books published in 1929 were grounded. Especially the concept of „phonological correlation" is rooted in a philosophical presupposition heterogeneous to the hypothesis described in the Moldovan grammar book published by Leonid Madan in the same period as Jakobson's *K kharakteristike*. Leonid Madan is rather close to the research in philology of the 19th century where the notions of „mother language", as the origin of a language family, and the „will of people", as spiritual mobile that vivifies a language, are central. In his Introduction to *The grammar of Moldovan language*, Madan mentioned that all the grammatical rules that he described are grounded in the *spoken* language of the Moldovan *people*[70]. By making this observation,

[70] „Граматика молдавского язика может быть составлена толъко после глубокого и всестороннего изучения *живои речи* всего молдавского *норода*", Leonid Madan, *Грамматика лимбий молдовенешть*, *op. cit.*, p. XI (our emphasis).



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Madan insists strongly that a language analysis interests him only from the point of view of its fundamental vivacity and in its melodically shaped dimension[71]. One must insist on the idea that Madan was a Moldovan linguist who uses in his writings the Cyrillic script: this is a sign, in the social and historical context where he acted, of an ideological influence in linguistic research. In his *Foreword* to *The Moldovan grammar* written by Madan, Pavel Chior clearly recognized that political goals have, from his point of view, a certain importance for linguistic research[72].

Instead, Jakobson, as we have seen at the beginning of our analysis, made it clear that his descriptions bring to light the „structural proximity" (*structuralinaia blizosti*) of languages and not the fact that languages came, or not, from the same *origin*. This means, and this is our third remark, that the political goals that oriented Jakobson's research were to be achieved by manipulating linguistic knowledge *heterogeneous* to that which structured the research of Leonid Madan. This is why scrupulous historical research must continuously be developed in order to analyze and criticize the *specificity* of the ways in which political ideology could twist the arm of linguistic knowledge in order to achieve goals that obey a different logic then a scientific one.

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[71] It is precisely from this point of view that we must understand the fact that Moldovan linguists, who had wrote in the same period as Madan, gathered and published Moldovan melodies. We think, for exemple, at Pavel I. Chior's *Cîntece moldoveneşti (norodnice)*, Balta, Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1927-1928. Let us remember that linguistic research of the 19th were closely linked to ethnographic studies. Gustav Ludwig Weigand, a german philologue who studied Moldovan dialects of Bessarabia and Bukowina, insisted that people's habits and melodies are equally important to be analyzed along with a strictly linguistic research in order to have a complete panorama of a local culture. On Moldovan habits studied by Weigand, see Gustav L. Weigand, *Die Dialekte Der Bukowina und Bessarabiens: Mit Einem Titelbilde Und Musikbeilagen*, Johann Ambrosius Barth, Leipzig, 1904, chap.D entitled „Volksweisen", p. 83-90.

[72] Pavel Chior, „Прикувынтари", in Leonid Madan, *Граматика лимбий молдовенешть*, *op. cit.*, p. I. As Patrick Sériot noted, Troubetzkoy was one of the most visible linguists of his times who believed and promoted the superiority of the Cyrillic scrip on the Latin script. Cf. Patrick Sériot, „De la géolinguistique à la géopolitique: Jakobson et la langue moldave", *op. cit.*



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