# Romanian Language Literacy in Vojvodina and in Eastern Serbia. Premises and Consequences of Linguistic Languages and Political Dialects

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## 1. Introduction

Any human society is a linguistic society; therefore, any linguistic activity is a social activity. The comprehension of all the language facts or actions of a society takes a political shape (Guespin, Marcellesi 1986: 9). Moreover, when we speak about multiethnic, multicultural surroundings, the discussion about linguistic politics is inevitable. The linguistic policy consists of taking decisions concerning the orientation and regulation of the language use for communication within a state (on a national level), or for communication between different states (at an international level), by using one, or more languages. The strategy for multilingualism of the European Union (Saramandu, Nevaci 2009 ; Commission of the European Communities) stresses the fact that speaking other languages and understanding other cultures (at the national, as well as at the international level), strengthens the connections between ethnically different individuals, different parts of Europe, while languages also represent the path that has to be followed for social integration and intercultural dialogue. The linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism are the main European values. Although today we regard multilingualism as a bridge between the different cultures, in the past some languages dominated and others were discriminated against, which, consequently, became assimilated, and, finally extinct. Today's European language policy focuses on the equal treatment of cultures and languages, which, being a many-sided issue discussed, for example, by Habermas (Habermas 2005), represents, in practice, a longer term process.

The analysis of the situation of the minority languages in Europe is even more complex, as, starting with the differences between ethnicity and nation, between minority and majority, and in spite of the European Charter for Regional or Minority

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Languages[1], the equal treatment of languages and cultures still leaves to be desired; this is only part of the linguistic policy as practically applied in certain circumstances even nowadays. It is in this respect that one can ponder upon the situation of the two Romanian minorities living in Serbia, which, although speaking the same idiom of the Romanian language, have been treated differently in history, due to biased linguistic policy. By drawing a parallel between the situation of the Romanian minority from Vojvodina and the Romanian minority from Eastern Serbia, this paper will also reveal some of the consequences arising from the double standards applied in the linguistic policy regarding these minorities.

### 2.1. Romanian Minority Language from Voivodina, Romanian Minority Language from Eastern Serbia and Literary Text Reception

In a previous paper (Dan, Minerva Trajlović-Kondan 2011), we have pointed to the issues of the reception of the literary works of the Romanian minority of Vojvodina (Serbian Banat) by the majority culture of Serbia (the country in which the Romanian minority lives), and that of Romania (the country whose mother tongue this minority population uses). The concrete results of our research point to the fact that, while this Romanian minority has a multicultural profile, being acquainted with the literary texts of the majority population of both countries, due, in the first place, to the texts that are present in their textbooks, this is not the case with the majority populations of the two countries (Serbia and Romania), who are neither aware of, nor interested in, the reception of writers of minority origin. The conclusion is that neither the majority culture of Serbia, nor that of Romania has an adequate reception of literary texts belonging to some of the most important minority Romanian writers of Vojvodina, such as: Slavco Almăjan, Ioan Flora, Pavel Gătăianţu, etc.

It is only the poet Vasko Popa, a Romanian native from Vojvodina, who is present in both the Serbian and Romanian majority cultures. The adequate reception of his poems in both majority cultures, as well as in the entire world, is probably enhanced by the fact that, although of Romanian minority ethnic origin, Vasko Popa chose to write in the dominant culture national Serbian language (called during his life Serbo-Croatian, as the official language of ex-Yugoslavia). The same fact is true for the poet Adam Puslojić, of Vlach origin, born in Eastern Serbia: he got to be known by his poetry written in the Serbian majority population language, after which, when 51 years old, he started to write in Romanian, his mother tongue. Therefore, the reception of his literary works occurred separately in the two countries (Serbia and Romania), according to the majority population language he used in his books of verse.

Unlike the Romanian minority writers of Vojvodina, Adam Puslojić is not present in the textbooks of the Vlachs of the Eastern Serbia, as this ethnic population

[1] "Regional or minority languages" means languages that are: traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; different from the official language(s) of that State; it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants" (Council of Europe, 5. XI. 1992; Andriescu, Mărăşoiu, Petraru)



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has not had them at all until recently (2013), and as those textbooks are founded on the idiom of the Romanian language as spoken locally in Eastern Serbia, presenting no interest either for enhancing the process of cognitive evolution of the children of this region in their mother tongue, or for broadening their horizons.

The minority Romanian population of Vojvodina, having a multicultural profile, being acquainted to and aware of both majority cultures' achievements, can be explained by the fact that it has been trained to have multicultural views, due to their education curricula and textbooks, issued in the Romanian language in Serbia. Although founded in the past on the communist notion of the 'brotherhood and unity' (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) of all nationalities living together in ex-Yugoslavia, and in spite of the ideological communist content of many of those texts, the textbooks used in schools by the Romanian national minority of Vojvodina promoted the multicultural profile of the minority population, founded on its broad reception of its own cultural achievements, as well as of the achievements of the other majority and minority cultures. As far as the Romanian minority of Vojvodina is concerned, the relation between the dominant and non-dominant cultures has been acquired due to the schools and textbooks in their Romanian mother tongue, a comfortable solution – although, for the writers themselves belonging to this minority, a broader reception of their works was possible only if they wrote in the language of the dominant culture.

### 2.2. Linguistic Languages and Political Dialects

Unlike the Romanian minority from Vojvodina, the Romanian ethnic minority from Eastern Serbia was included neither in an overall national cultural programme, nor in an educational one in their mother tongue. The children from the linguistic enclaves of Eastern Serbia were supposed to learn Serbian (a language of Slavic origin), the dominant culture language, before going to school. Only in that way were they able to attend education in the Serbian language exclusively. Although speaking the same idiom of the Romanian language as the minority of Vojvodina, the children of Eastern Serbia have been deprived of the possibility to have textbooks in their mother tongue.

Since the communist regimes were extinct in all Eastern Europe, the issue of the dominant and non-dominant cultures has changed, not only with respect to the Romanian minority from Vojvodina and/or the one from Eastern Serbia as related to the Serbian culture; it has, paradoxically, changed as a result of the transformations that took place within the dominant Serbo-Croatian language and culture themselves. After the fall of communism and the falling apart of ex-Yugoslavia (Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia), the Serbian majority culture faced great problems itself – not being endangered in any way by the above mentioned Romanian national minorities. As all cultures are founded, in the first place, on the language the respective community speaks, and as the majority population has been divided into separate countries, the name of the official language changed, according to the claims of the countries that resulted after the collapse. The Serbo-Croatian language of ex-Yugoslavia does not exist any longer officially, although the population speaks exactly the same language as before. According to the newly



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established independent and suzerain countries which 'sprang up' after the war in the nineties 90's of the last century, the Serbo-Croatian language became: Serbian, Croat, Bosnian (with its endeavor to differentiate the idioms of the 'Serbian', 'Croat' and 'Muslim' nationalities), Montenegrin… The ideological and identity factors promoted by the new countries seem to be one of the main aims of their cultural policy. Although, for example, German is still called German, both in Austria and Germany, or Switzerland, the names of the languages spoken in the new states resulted from the falling apart of Yugoslavia, usually follow ethnic, not linguistic criteria. Although, in theory, globalization and democracy strive to multiculturalism, on the ground of ex-Yugoslavia the process is quite opposite, and based on differentiation. While the Romanian minorities try to keep a multicultural profile, the dominant cultures have undergone a process of dissipation and separation. Ranko Bugarski concludes that 'the Serbo-Croatian language exists and does not exist at the same time, depending on the level we approach it. (The fact that the adopted point of view defines the very object of study has been introduced into linguistics in the past, at least at the time of Ferdinand de Saussure). I usually summarise this pending situation [in ser. *uslovno rečeno*] by saying that 'today Serbo-Croatian is a linguistic language in the shape of three political dialects' (Bugarski 2009: 123).

Opposing linguistic criteria to political dialects in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia has become an overall contemporary tendency. The Romanian linguistic language spoken by the Romanian minorities has been undergoing the same process. Consequently, Romanian idioms belonging to Vojvodina, on the one hand, and to Eastern Serbia enclaves, on the other hand, have also been politically differentiated, although they are linguistically and practically the same language.

### 3. Political Agreements and Issues of Literacy: Romanian Minority Language in Vojvodina and in Eastern Serbia – a Parallel

In the background mentioned above, both the Romanian ethnic minority of Vojvodina, and the one of Eastern Serbia remained within the borders of the Serbian dominant language and culture after ex-Yugoslavia fell apart. We agree with Ranko Bugarski that the understanding of the situation of these minorities depends on the very level from which we approach the Romanian language and/or the idioms spoken by these minorities. Both in the case of the respective minority located in Vojvodina, and in Eastern Serbia, Romanian, as a linguistic language, has been divided into two political dialects; they were practically founded, since the communist times, on the main criteria of 'being allowed', or 'not being allowed' to open schools and have textbooks in their mother tongue. (The same goes with opening churches in one's mother tongue, which is part of the same issue of political identity-formation).

The Romanian minority of Vojvodina, has got the right to open schools after *The Convention Regarding the Organization of Minority Primary Schools in Banat* (Popi 1996 : 284, Spăriosu 1992, Albert 2012) (*Convenţia privind organizarea şcolilor primare minoritare din Banat*), signed by the Yugoslav and the Romanian sides in 1933, in which the two countries agreed, on a reciprocal basis, to open



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schools for the ethnic minority of the other country. As both the Serbian and the Romanian minority populations from the border region of Banat[2], which was shared between Yugoslavia and Romania, were practically illiterate and did not have teachers and textbooks, later, the parts agreed to a transfer of some thirty teachers from one country to the other, who also helped with the curriculum and the textbooks. Moreover, during the communist times, under the slogan of 'brotherhood and unity', the Romanian minority of the Serbian Banat (Vojvodina), was given the right to massively open schools in their mother tongue, to have a printing house, *Libertatea*, to issue books and magazines in their mother tongue – which was also, mutually, allowed to the Serbian minority from the Romanian Banat. We will not discuss here the communist doctrine, present in some of the issued texts, and manuals on both sides. What matters here is the fact that that, although mainly agrarian, the Romanian ethnic population of Vojvodina was allowed to get literate and to choose, if they wanted, to attend school either in their mother tongue, or in Serbo-Croatian, as a consequence of the reciprocal *Convention Regarding the Organisation of Minority Primary Schools in Banat*, signed by the Romanian and Yugoslav sides, for the benefit of their minority living in the neighboring country – which is a political act, backing up an ethno-linguistic fact.

The benefit at a cultural level for these populations, that of being included into a political agreement is, in the first place, literacy in their mother tongue. As a consequence, many other benefits can be mentioned, such as: the possibility to develop a multicultural, tolerant profile, the possibility to synchronize with Europe and the world. Getting updated by means of literacy in one's mother tongue means, at an individual level, having the opportunity to evolve as a human being, while, at an ethnic community level, it represents the possibility to escape enclavisation, to reach out to a modern world, founded on communication. Neither of those minority populations have ever caused any political trouble within the dominant culture in which they have lived. Today, the Romanian minority from Vojvodina and the Serbian minority from Romania can stand as positive examples of solving cultural and identity issues of minorities by clever political agreements, which enhance literacy and fundamental human rights.

Unlike the Romanian minority from Vojvodina, the so called 'Vlach' population from the East of Serbia was not given a choice, that is, it did not get the political and cultural privilege of having schools opened in their Romanian mother tongue, nor any textbooks until 2013 – while opening churches in their mother tongue is an issue with negative connotations and consequences even to this day.

The interesting paradox is that both these Romanian mainly rural populations (from Vojvodina, and from Eastern Serbia) speak at home the same idioms of Romanian language origin; however, they are treated in a different manner by the majority population. In the case of the Romanian minority of Banat, the speeches are called: *oltenesc*, *bănăţean*, *ardelenesc*, that is, the speech originating from: *Oltenia* (the Romanian historical province of Wallachia), the speech of *Banat*, and the speech of Transylvania/*Ardeal* (which used to be part of the Austro-Hungarian

[2] Banat is a multiethnical border region, having been divided between Romania and Serbia after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.



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empire in the past). The so called *Vlachs*, who live in Eastern Serbia, according to their speech, are of exactly the same origin as the Romanian minority from Vojvodina: *Ţărani* (coming also from the historical province of Wallachia, called in Romanian Ţara Românească), *Ungureni* (coming also from Banat or Transylvania/ Ardeal, which used to be under the rule of Austro-*Hungarian* empire)[3]. Using practically the same idioms of the Romanian language, the rural populations from Vojvodina and Eastern Serbia were illiterate to the same extent at the beginning of the 20th century. However, it seems to be politics which decided whether to educate the representatives of these minorities in their mother tongue, or not. It is politics that opposes political dialects to linguistic criteria, trying to promote new identities, which have not existed for centuries.

Even today, the differences among the Romanian language idioms present in Vojvodina and in Eastern Serbia are practically non-existent and can be regarded only in terms of literacy into one's mother tongue: while the Romanian minority of Vojvodina have a higher level of literacy, having got a richer vocabulary as a result of education, the Romanian population of Eastern Serbia, who were not allowed literacy in their mother tongue, borrowed from Serbian words denominating contemporary life style, especially words from the field of modern technology and science.

Nowadays, after the fall of the communism, when society has become democratic, the fact is that the Romanian minority of Vojvodina continues to have the inherited right to learn in schools in their mother tongue the standard Romanian language, to have textbooks and written texts for the different subject matters, to have church service in their mother tongue – which are facts founded between the two World Wars and later supported by the communist regime, which gave them the right even to open a printing house and issue newspapers and magazines, as well. In the case of the Romanian minority of Vojvodina, the argument that they did not have written texts in the Romanian standard language has not been invoked by the majority Serbian population, while allowing them to open schools and church service in their mother tongue. However, this argument has been, discriminatingly, invoked with respect to the Romanians of the Eastern Serbia, who were not allowed to open schools in their mother tongue until recently, nor to have church service in Romanian.

[3] The language and the national costume, not to talk about other characteristics, clearly show that the Romanians from this region originate from the different regions at the North of the Danube; therefore, the Romanians from the Western mountain region know that they have come from Hungaria, that is why they are called *ungurjani***,** while the Romanians of the Eastern part are called *carani* and came from Tzara Romaneasca (romanian: *Ţara Românească*) (Valsan 2003: 109). Besides these two groups of Vlachs, there are another two of them – *ungurjani – munćani* and *bufani. Ungurjani* are the most numerous group of the Romanians from the Timok river valley, and live in the region bordered by the rivers Zapadna Morava, Crna reka, Dunav and Timok, and their speach is the most symilar to the the Banat Romanian speech. On the other hand, the speech of *carani*, who live in the region of Ključ and Negotinska Krajina, is similar to the Romanian dialect of Muntenia. *Ungurjani – munćani* are a mixture of *carani* and *ungurjani*, while the *bufani* live in the mining town of Majdanpek. Besides these, there are also the *băieşi*, the miners, whose mother tongue is Romanian, and who live in the faraway localities of the Timok villages (Sorescu-Marinković 2012: 28).



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### 3.1. Romanian Language in Curricula and Textbooks in Eastern Serbia. Models of a 'Newly-Born' Language

The recommendations regarding minorities in Serbia are optimistic: "Council of Europe Committee of Ministers calls upon Serbia to provide teaching in/of all the minority languages at all levels, strengthen the teacher training and provide adequate teaching materials" (Concil of Europe 2013). Hovever, facts show differently. We have had the opportunity to leaf through the newly issued manual of 'Romanian language with elements of national culture', dedicated to the children of Eastern Serbia. Standard Romanian being avoided (which is not the case of the Romanian language taught in Vojvodina), some strange texts have been issued, entitled, for example: "Panda învacă kung-fu" (Panda learns kung-fu). Those texts have been obviously produced by authors who are neither philologists, nor teachers by profession, although the respective textbook is supposed to be used by university educated teachers in the process of teaching. In order to illustrate the situation, as transposed into English, imagine a textbook written in an idiom of the English language, let's say, a cockney English manual, half written in the Latin alphabet, half in the Cyrillic, in which the same words, denominating the same thing, are written differently, in the same textbook, etc. The intention of this textbook is, probably – at least judging by the title of the object of study ('Romanian language with elements of national culture') – supposed to support and preserve the anonymous oral cultural 'legacy' of the 'Vlach' rural tradition from immemorial times as 'national culture' and present it to the children of Eastern Serbia of today. However, the 'tradition' becomes here the subjective creation of its utterly incompetent authors, who were probably not interested themselves in getting literate in their own mother tongue, or they couldn't. After all, what is the character Panda representative for, as far as the Romanian tradition of Eastern Serbia is concerned? The same question can be asked about 'kung-fu'. Moreover, the adopted form of writing, cannot be found in any software, and looks like a ciphered writing code, in which the letters 'î' and 'ă' are taken from the Romanian alphabet, while the Romanian letter 'ţ' is replaced by 'c'. Therefore, the text can be read only by a person who is both literate and fluent in Romanian (level C1 and C2), and in the course of reading it, the person can 'guess' the real words, by noticing the utter mistakes made by the text authors. If we are well-meant, we can ask ourselves if the authors intended to make a sort of innovational experiment with the children from Eastern Serbia, as if they were guinea pigs – which is unacceptable, cruel and sad at the same time. What other conclusion can one draw in such circumstances of experimenting not only with orthography, but with human rights as well? Not only does the textbook lack in literate texts, but it also lacks in relevance, both in the field of tradition and innovation. Moreover, it lacks a cultural orientation, a cultural framework and pedagogical methodology.

Any possibility of teaching the children from Eastern Serbia something new and valuable in their mother tongue is excluded. On the contrary, 'The Tales for Children', in the very title, are the first time mentioned as 'Повјестјиј дје копиј'



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[povjestjij dje kopij][4], and the second time (the same title) as 'Povješć dî kopij'[5] – the tales, as a genuine children's nightmare, for which the grown-up authors have no excuse. As there is no explanation why the Latin alphabet is mixed up with the Cyrillic one, while teaching a language of Latin origin – and even doing so, why *the same words* are presented with a different pronunciation (in the Cyrillic and in the Latin alphabet respectively) in the same textbook title? Does this situation show any good will to synchronize this ethnic community with the rest of the world, as it was the case with the Romanian minority from Vojvodina? How can one possibly talk about democratic standards in education, and not of discrimination, if the solution was found for the education of the initially illiterate Romanian minority of Vojvodina in the thirties of the last century, while, for the Romanian population of Eastern Serbia, speaking the same idioms of the Romanian language, it has not been found yet?

Having been deprived of school education in their mother tongue, of literacy, that is, having been deprived of the possibility of linguistic and cultural evolution and synchronization with the contemporary world, the Romanians from Eastern Serbia have been left to live in ethno-linguistic enclaves, to use an archaic/popular Romanian language with Slavic neologisms at home. Therefore, unlike the Romanian minority from Vojvodina, the Romanians from Eastern Serbia have been largely assimilated by the majority Serbian population. Although there is practically no difference between the Romanian idiom from Voivodina and that from the Eastern Serbia, except for the degree of the speakers' literacy in their mother tongue, the linguistic and cultural policy of the majority population is inclined to define the Romanian idiom from Eastern Serbia as a quite different 'language': a 'new' language of non-Romanian identity. Is the Romanian idiom spoken in Eastern Serbia really a different linguistic language, requiring even the invention of a new alphabet and orthography, or is it a new 'political dialect', enhancing a new, Serbian, identity of its speakers? If the Serbo-Croat linguistic identity (of ex-Yugoslavia) fell apart into more 'political dialects' (as R. Bugarski puts it), this seems to be the case of the Romanian idiom spoken in Eastern Serbia. Ironically, the policy of assimilation is, probably, the only explanation why during the classes of 'Romanian language with elements of national culture', the children from Eastern Serbia are taught about 'Panda' and 'kung-fu'.

### 3.2. Criteria for Romanian National Minorities Textbooks

It is obvious that the criteria for choosing the texts for the Romanian minority of Vojvodina and those for Eastern Serbia are different. The difference is cultural

[4] Latin alphabet transcription of the Cyrillic – shows that the title written in Cyrrilic, by the textbook authors, does not match the same title the authors wrote in the Latin alphabet (Marian Dan and Minerva Trajlović-Kondan).

[5] Ordinance amending the Ordinance on the Curriculum for the 4th grade of primary education, *Vlach Language with Elements of National Culture,* Belgrade, 18th August, 2014 (http://slglasnik.info/sr/11-2014-20-08-2014-prosvetni-glasnik-6/25427-pravilnik-o-dopuni-pravilnika-o-nastavnom-programu-za-cetvrti-razred-osnovnog-obrazovanja-i-vaspitanja.html).



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policy, or assimilation. In the first case, the Romanian language and culture are presented within the inevitable process of evolution, which is necessarily and ceaselessly going on in each and every nation. The aim of the respective textbooks is to update the children, enabling them to make the reception not only of literary texts, but also of texts containing notions pertaining to the modern sciences, represented in schools by the different objects of study in their mother tongue. In the second case, the existing textbooks and curricula view the Romanian language and folklore traditions as static and dead phenomena, which must be preserved as such, as today 'we have finally become aware' that we are dealing with valuable cultural facts, undergoing a process of extinction. Although extinction goes hand in hand with the policy of assimilation, and although 'the Vlachs' from Eastern Serbia were not allowed to open schools and churches in their mother tongue, they are made responsible for their not having produced written texts in their mother tongue… However, the rural Romanian minority of Vojvodina had not produced texts in their mother tongue either and, still, it was allowed proper education in their mother tongue. The textbooks of Vojvodina have had normal textbooks, suited to the vocabulary of each subject matter (as the majority population textbooks are). Even children belonging to the majority population learn modern, scientific terminology, which is one of the reasons why they are supposed to attend school. In this case, the argument that the Romanians from Eastern Serbia did not have a written language cannot stand either. It is not necessary to produce literary auctorial written works in order to be allowed to attend the contemporary subject matters in one's mother tongue. Comparing the textbooks of the majority Serbian population, and the textbooks of the Romanian minority of Vojvodina, the textbooks from Eastern Serbia seem to be a biased and incompetent mockery, as shown above. Nowadays, having got university education themselves, teachers of Romanian tend to use, in their pedagogic practice, the manuals from Vojvodina to teach the children from Eastern Serbia, as the officially issued textbooks for this population are not practicable.

### 3.3. The Issues of Language, Cognition and the Subject Matters as Texts

All textbooks for children, whether the majority or the minority population is concerned, should envisage the fact that reality undergoes a constant process of change, which is inevitably contained in the language. In this process, language is a cognitional instrument. The 'new, cognitive conception of learning can guide future research on both learning and instruction' (Shuell 1986: 411). If one is illiterate in one's mother tongue, this does not only mean that the person does not possess the skill of reading and writing, but it also means that the respective person has got a differently structured cognition of the world. Since it is by language that we explain 'reality,' the cognitional function of language is fundamental. With the evolution of science and man's access to it by education and mass-media, man's cognition also evolves. We go to school in order to broaden and deepen our cognition of the world, to get informed about an updated notion about 'reality'.

In today's globalist and democratic society the schooling system providing cognition by means of one's mother tongue is a fundamental human right. No matter



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its ethnic origin, any child goes to school to become at least 'literate', not only with regard to the orthographic conventions of a certain language, but in order to get updated about the contemporary 'reality', reflected into his subject matters. As the evolution of language goes in parallel with the evolution of science, of the human society, of the view of the world, it is only by getting education in one's mother tongue, founded on contemporary scientific texts, as subject matters, that the child becomes an equal citizen of the modern world. And those 'scientific' words are not a nation's privilege, but are common international words, the Vlach children should benefit from them, as the Romanian minority from Vojvodina does, as well as the majority Serbian population. The reception of such texts is a 'must needs' category for the manuals written for the children of Eastern Serbia in their mother tongue, if we respect them and care for their evolution.

**4. Stages of Literacy and World Cognition**

If one tries to look at languages synchronically, that is in a certain moment of their evolution, one can state that, roughly speaking, each nation has gotthree forms/aspects of language: 1. the *popular* language, as spoken by the people who did not attend school, which is very vivid, but has got reduced means of expression; 2. The *common* language, as it is usually spoken in towns, with richer means of expression, and 3. The *literary* language, used mainly by intellectuals, expressing subtler notions and sophisticated thoughts, reflecting higher education (Capidan 1943: 4). While the majority communities of the East European countries have got the three aspects of their languages mentioned above, as they have text books in schools for the different subject matters in the respective majority population mother tongue, this is not the case with all the minority community languages.

In other words, the individuals belonging to the majority Serbian population can choose if they want to have broader language possibilities, which means, as we have shown, wider horizons of thinking and cognition, or they are satisfied to stop their education at a certain level. Although the European democratic society of today should give all individuals equal chances in having education and textbooks for the different subject matters in their mother tongue, the Romanian population from Eastern Serbia has been left behind in this process of synchronization with the global science and culture in their mother tongue. Their form of speech can be only the *popular* one, used in childhood, at home, in their linguistic 'enclave'. 'Their' only 'choice' is to have one preparatory year before attending school, during which they learn Serbian, the majority population language in order to achieve literacy. As the evolution of the language goes hand in hand with the evolution of human society, the children that live in linguistic enclaves and do not have schoolbooks in their mother tongue are compelled to remain further on in backward societies, unless they decide to change their identity by studying in the language of the dominant culture, which they are compelled to learn before attending school.

In the discussion about literacy there is another aspect, which has been rarely mentioned, as a very delicate personal question is related to it: the complex of inferiority of the illiterate person belonging to an ethnic minority group. We usually hear how wonderful a *popular* language and ethnic culture heritage is and this



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statement is always related to the wonderfully preserved folkloric traditions in the enclaves. In fact, the literate people mock at the illiterate ones. The reason for mocking at them is not so much the 'funny' popular language they use, but the unscientific, cognitive approach. Below is a quotation from a recent Serbian magazine text, in which the journalist finds hilarious the fact that illiterate Serbian peasants (who probably chose not to go to school, although it was their right and obligation), living some 40 km away from the Serbian town of Valjevo, believe in the miraculous 'quantum fields' of energy (with no scientific proof), able to cure sciatic nerve pain. Not only does the peasant believe in the miraculous 'healing power' of what he himself calls 'quantum fields', but he also uses distorted words, phrases lacking logic, ranging in a sort of an avalanche of hilarious argumentation. Moreover, the journalist's text reveals to what extend illiteracy in one's mother tongue reflects the close relation between incorrect talking and inappropriate thinking:

> Ali, razgovoru nikad kraja, pristigli seljak iz Drenajića, veli da je staj'o prošle godine [u energetskim polima], izlečio se, bio ga pritisk'o išijak, odavde, dovde, prim'o 'nekcije, trošio praškove, ništa, doneli ga u čaršavu, kad izaš'o iz polja odma' seo na traktor, nest'o išijak, prestali žigovi. A šta nije vidio, za jednu, kad je vidio kakva je, rek'o da ni Amerika ne može da je izleči, eno je, 'vala bogu, oda, bio i onaj što bio ko sveća, lepši ima u kapeli kad umru, bio sav skvrćen, ispravio se čovek, tražio da mu donese kilo rakije, doneo... Kad novinar krenuo, Profesor i za njega izvadi antenu, antena se zavrti, iz prve pogodi, kosti, zglobovi, i propisa 12 nedelja terapije (Todorović, 2015, 66). [Our conversation went on forever, "I stood in it [the energy field] a year back", swore the peasant from Drenajića, "and cured myself. I had the sciatica bad, from here to here. They gave me jabs, powders, but nothing helped, so they carried me up here in a sheet, and as soon as I came out of the energy field, I got right up on me tractor. The sciatica was gone," he continued "and the tingling was gone. And I've seen many such cases, a woman, when he saw her, he said that even America couldn't cure her, but look at her now, thanks God, she can walk now, and there was the guy who was like a candle, you can find better looking people at the morgue when they're dead, he was all shriveled up, but the man got right and asked for a bottle of liquor, I brought it…" "Then the journalist started, the Professor took out his antenna too, and the antenna started turning round, he figured out straight away what was wrong, the bones, the joints, and he made a prescription for 12 weeks of therapy"].

The quotation above is a vivid example for the interrelation between language literacy and cognition, and it points to the importance of attending schools in one's mother tongue, in which at least elementary scientific notions should be given, no matter if one's mother tongue belongs to the majority or minority ethnic group. The point is that the majority Serbian ethnic language community and the Romanians from Vojvodina have been given the possibility and the choice to improve their language skills and, at the same time, acquire contemporary cognition of the world – if they want to; they have had textbooks for the different subject matters. As far as the Romanians from Eastern Serbia are concerned, a discriminating policy is still applied, as their only chance to become literate is by renouncing their mother tongue, that is – renouncing their identity. If the Romanian population from Eastern



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Serbia remains illiterate, such inadequate ways of thinking remain a probability, not only a possibility. Can we, then, speak of the 'beauty' of the Vlach folklore and their well-known magic and 'spells', while we do not allow them to get literate in their mother tongue? Are we candid when we say that we appreciate their tradition, or their 'traditional' way of thinking, which might be as hilarious as the case of the illiterate Serb mentioned above? Can we, therefore, assert that such 'folklore' ways of cognition are 'characteristic' of the entire Romanian population of Eastern Serbia, unless it gets assimilated by attending Serbian schools, where they acquire a modern, updated cognition of the world? The children from Eastern Serbia should not be discriminated against, they should have the same rights as those from Vojvodina.

## 5. Literacy and the Inferiority Complex

### 5.1. Textbooks in One's Mother Tongue from a Dyachronical Perspective

The hilarious aspect of illiteracy in one's mother tongue, paralleled by an obsolete or inadequate way of thinking (cognition) has created inferiority complexes within the inhabitants of all the Balkan countries, as Maria Todorova explains in her extensive study *Imagining the Balkans* (Todorova 2006: 105–106). Being an inhabitant of the Balkans means being looked down at, not only by the world, the respective inhabitants themselves have an inferiority complex, as they themselves adopt 'the other's' opinion about them and would like to be 'different', to be 'somebody else'. The same goes for the Romanian speaking population of Eastern Serbia: they would rather be 'Serbs', and have access to education, than been looked down on.

What Todorova does not ponder upon sufficiently while speaking of the inferiority complex of the inhabitants of the Balkan countries is the fact that, due to historical hardships (the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empire occupation, for example), the Balkan countries had relatively late access not only to mass education, but also to the standardization of the respective languages. It was only in the 19th century that the standardization of the majority national languages of the Balkans underwent the process of massive education in schools, relying on textbooks which made possible the same way of pronouncing (reading) and writing, in order to be able to acquire the basis of the contemporary cognition of the world. It was only in this way that the population of the national states of Eastern Europe was enabled to their synchronization with the Western European society. It was education in one's mother tongue that laid the basis of acquiring an equally standardized scientific corpus, by enriching the childhood language with new notions. The textbooks of the different subject matters were essential in the process of cognition, as the newly acquired notions went hand in hand with the evolution of the national language. In spite of the fact that the scientific notions themselves were most often borrowings from the western languages, they were adapted to the respective East European languages and introduced in textbooks. The reception of textbooks has signified the reception of innovation. Although, since then, endless discussions have prevailed in the Balkan countries about the relation between *tradition* and *innovation*, the evolution of language, society and culture has shown that synchronization with the



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European standards can be seen as a benefit. In this respect, textbooks in one's mother tongue for the different subject matters are essential for getting a contemporary world view, or *Weltanschauung.* The same criteria for education should be equally applied to majority and minority population in textbooks in one's mother tongue. The Balkan countries have taken a long historical time to synchronize with the West; it took them long to acquire the standardization of their own language, which, diachronically speaking, happened not long ago. Therefore, they should not ban the literacy in their mother tongue of the minorities having lived together with them for centuries. The more so as the Romanian minorities from Vojvodina and Eastern Serbia have always been faithful and dedicated to the majority Serbian aims in history.

### 5.2. Dominant *versus* Non-Dominant Cultures of the Region. Assimilation and Auto-Assimilation

The non-dominant cultures of the region, existing within the dominant ones, have had troubles in this process of synchronization with the European standards. In spite of all rethoric promoting democracy and human rights, the countries that have recently become sovereign and independent seem to, practically consider the ethnic minorities as an impediment to their own national enthusiasm and would rather assimilate them, which is a process founded on depriving those minorities of their national identity, by not allowing them to open schools, printing houses, and have religious service in their mother tongue, by not allowing them to decide by themselves what nation they identify with. Let's look, for example, nowadays at Croats, fighting to ban the traditional Serbian Cyrillic writing, used by the Serbian minority in Croatia (in the town Vukovar, for example). The paradox is that Croats and Serbs speak linguistically the same language, but, obviously, two different 'political dialects', as R. Bugarski puts it. The same relation between majority and minority population is to be noticed in Serbia, trying to impose the cyrillic writing to the Vlach population, speaking a Romance language, of Latin origin, for which the Latin alphabet is probably better suited; the same goes for the endeavor to differentiate the Romanian minority of Vojvodina and the one from Eastern Serbia, that practically speak the same Romanian language idiom and can be judged separately only from the point of view of the level of literacy they can achieve in their mother tongue.

As opposite to the tendency of the dominant cultures to synchronise with the modern world, the process of enclavisation of the Romanians from Eastern Serbia leads to their inferiority complex, due to illiteracy in their mother tongue, that is, due to the restricted possibilities of thought and expression in it. What Maria Todorova defined as the inferiority complex of the populations in the Balkan countries, who take over and adopt the negative opinion about them produced within the dominant cultures, is equally valid as a process, when the relation between a majoritary and a minority population of the same country are concerned.

It is illiteracy that induces the inferiority complex in the minority population, which engenders the need 'to be something else' within this population,– that is, to change language, change identity in order to get educated. Assimilation can be,



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therefore, practically regarded as auto-assimilation. Therefore, the very process of assimilation is founded, in the first place, on banning access to literacy in one's mother tongue, which induces an ethnic inferiority complex, finally leading to one's renouncing one's own native identity and assimilation into majority population identity. The Vlach intellectuals, academically educated and living in an urban background together with the majority Serbian population, will rather not mention their true origin, which is silently related to the fact of being backward. In one of his poems in Serbian, Adam Puslojić, a famous Vlach poet, mentions 'sir i sifilis'/'cheese and syphyllis', as a negative identitary connotation for the Vlachs. The inferiority complex goes so far that, for example, intellectuals of Belgrade of the same Vlach origin avoid speaking to each other in their mother tongue.

Unfortunately, the poverty of the Vlach/Romanian language is a mere truth, unless the Vlach attend education in the non-maternal, Serbian language, or German, if the family emigrates to Germany or Austria, usually leaving entire villages bare. On the other hand, the children of Vlach parents origin who live in Belgrade, usually cannot speak Romanian; they might understand it a little, if their grandmothers came to town to take care of them. It is hard to say how they feel about their own identity, but they would rather give up their Romanian origin and be 'somebody else', as they are aware of the illiteracy in their mother tongue with a feeling of shame.

The Vlach identity issue is not only founded on illiteracy, but also on the politically maintained confusion of terminology, as an alibi in the process of assimilation. If one asks a Vlach in Romanian the question 'What are you?' ('Ce eşti tu?'), they will say 'Eu mi's rumân' ('I'm a Romanian'), but if one asks the same question in Serbian: 'Šta si ti?', they will answer 'Ja sam Vlah' ('I am a Vlach'), which is the name the majority Serbian population uses to define the ethnic origin of the Romanians from Eastern Serbia. And it is only in that way that they are 'different' from the Romanian minority of Vojvodina, who will answer even in Serbian that they are Romanians. It is evident that, as Maria Todorova puts it, the Romanians from Eastern Serbia adopt (when speaking in Serbian, i.e. with Serbs) the opinion of the majority population about them, while, the more literate Romanians of the Romanian minority of Vojvodina do not. This happens in spite of the fact that the two populations are practically of the same origin, as we have shown above. However, if one asks what language they speak, the representatives of both Eastern Serbia region and Vojvodina will say they speak Romanian.

If, for the moment, we ignore the identity issues and look at the terminological difference between the notions of *Vlachs* and *Romanians*, we come to a linguistic issue occurring frequently: the use of different words/names for the same reality. For example, the same town of Vienna (Wien-germ.) is called differently in various languages; the town is known as Beč in Serbian. Similarly, the same ethnic Romanian idiom speaking individuals of Eastern Serbia are called in Serbian 'Vlachs', while they call themselves 'Romanians', when speaking Romanian. If asked what language they speak, they will say they speak Romanian. In the past, the Southern part of today's Romania, which is North of the river Danube used to be called Vallachia, which points to another paradox: by naming the population South of Danube as Vlach, the Serbs do not define it as non-Romanian, as it intends to, but as a linguistically Romanian population, while, in practice, it makes an inadequate



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discrimination between this population and the Romanians from Vojvodina, as far as literacy in one's mother tongue is concerned. We must mention the fact that Romania has never had any territorial requests from Serbia in history, and *vice versa*, and the good Serbo-Romanian relations stand as an outstanding example of historical friendship – which is also an important argument to allow the population of Eastern Serbia get literate in their mother tongue. With respect to the excellent Serbo-Romanian relations, the famous Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga (also one of the founders of the Institute for Balkan Studies within the Serbian Academy) said that Romania has got only two valuable friends at its territorial borders: the Serbs and the Black Sea.

The ethnic dilemma of the Romanians of Eastern Serbia has been built up. The real difference between the Romanian minority from Vojvodina and the Vlach population is the fact that the first has attended at least elementary school in Romanian, while the second was not given the right to, on the premises that Vlachs are something different than the Romanians. However, if literacy itself is left aside, children from Romania, children from Vojvodina, and children from Eastern Serbia could very well understand each other. After attending school in their mother tongue, adults from Romania and from Vojvodina could express more abstract thoughts, while those from Eastern Serbia could do that to a much smaller extent, which reflects their being discriminated against. Why should a child from Vojvodina have the privilege to learn a *common* Romanian language, at least, while the child from Eastern Serbia should adopt in school the language of 'the other'?

Assimilation of the non-dominant cultures by the dominant ones seems to be an inevitable process, in the long run – this is a statistic fact. Moreover, in the era of mass-media, globalization, multiethnic and multicultural communication, ethnic enclaves disappear. The younger population belonging to both Romanian ethnic minority from Vojvodina, and to Eastern Serbia, usually speaks Serbian fluently. Hovever, a difference in behavior can be identified, while comparing the representatives of the two Romanian minority groups: while the persons from the first group will talk about their Romanian identity, the individuals of the second will rather hide their origin – we have noticed this behavior pattern even among our students, who chose Romanian as an object of academic studies. Having had the possibility of being educated in their mother tongue, in elementary school at least, by means of appropriate textbooks, the Romanian minority population of Vojvodina do not feel the urge to hide their mother tongue and origin, while the Vlachs do. Moreover, this kind of approach to education in one's mothertongue, as practiced in Voivodina, does not diminish the students' bilingual skills, as they are usually fluent in both Serbian and Romanian, while the representatives of the Vlach population are not.

### 6. Conclusion as Question for Eastern Serbia Textbook Authors

The question 'why the poet of Vlach origin Adam Puslojić is not present in Eastern Serbia textbooks?' – brings us back to the beginning of this paper, where the issue of reception is discussed. Literary reception is a complex process, tied to the recognition of cultural values. However, as language goes hand in hand with the process of cognition, in order to attain that stage of values awareness, it is essential



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for a community to lingistically (i.e. in terms of cognition) evolve from the stage of the *popular language*, through the stage of *common language*, to that of *literary language* (Capidan 1943: 4). Textbooks for the Eastern Serbia children are not supposed to contain literary texts in elementary school. But they *are supposed* to present, at least, texts of common language, in which elementary scientific ideas are given to improve the child's vocabulary and cognition of the contemporary world – as those ideas are given to Serbian, or Romanian children from Vojvodina. By acquiring at least the 'common language' skills, children from Eastern Serbia are not supposed to read their co-national poems in Romanian, but could at least get informed that Adam Puslojić is a valuable poet of Vlach origin, writing equally in Serbian and Romanian – which is, culturally speaking, at least as important for the Vlach community as Panda and kung-fu...

With the existing textbooks, made up by incompetent authors, who preferred to remain anonymous, we ask ourselves if the Vlachs will ever be able to read Adam Puslojić's poetry written in Romanian, his and their mother tongue, or they must have the verse transposed into the Romanian *popular* idiom they use in childhood, as written in the cyrillic form, as it is 'desirable' for the architects of the 'new-born' Eastern Serbia political dialect. For now, we will give our translation of this identity 'Vlach' tragedy from Romanian into English,: '…My writing is my coffin, not/ anything else. A sign,/ Logos, a word/ of a beginning./ I'm starting now./ I'm writing/ a coffin, a new coffin/.' ('…Scrisul meu/ este sicriul meu, nu/ altceva. Un semn/ un Logos, un cuvânt/ al începutului. / Încep acum. Scriu/ un sicriu, un nou sicriu./' *Scris înăuntru*/ Written inside)[6] (Puslojić 1995: 13).

The Vlach textbooks inventing new Romanian 'language standards', new alphabets, etc., nourish a confused identity of the respective minority population. Therefore, the Vlach identity issue is not likely to be solved soon, metaphorically representing, as the Vlach poet Adam Puslojić puts it: 'a coffin, a new coffin'. It seems that this population's literacy in their mother tongue is a vain, almost poetical, dream – while for the Vlachs the only real and true solution is 'to write inside', i.e. to keep their identity for themselves. It is interesting to note, in Romanian, the alliteration between 'scriu' and 'sicriu' ('I write' and 'coffin'). The dominant culture has now finally allowed the production of textbooks for the children of Eastern Serbia. However, those incompetent and biased textbooks are obviously 'new coffins' for the Vlach ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity, as the children are not taught to write in their mother tongue – as if writing in Romanian were a sort of a 'dead issue'.

We are not as pessimistic as the Vlach poet is. Still, for optimism to persist, there is an urging need to change the curricula of the Romanian children from Eastern Serbia, following the example of the one of the Romanian minority from Vojvodina, as those populations are closely linguistically and culturally related. Also: the incompetent authors of the Vlach textbooks must be replaced, in the first place.

[6] Translated from Romanian into English by Mariana Dan.



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## Abstract

The Romanian minority from Voivodina (Serbian Banat) and the Romanian minority from Eastern Serbia are linguistically, ethnically and culturally related communities. However, the policy of the dominant/majority culture wants to nurture them different identities. Although the Romanian idioms of both rural regions are of the same origin, in the first case (Vojvodina) literacy in their mother tongue was organized in 1933, as a result of a political agreement between Yugoslavia and Romania, while, in the second case (Eastern Serbia) it was not allowed until 2013. Therefore, while the Romanian minority from Voivodina is literate in their mother tongue (having been allowed to open schools, to have church service in Romanian, and a Printing house), the Romanian minority from Eastern Serbia was deprived of the fundamental human right to, at least, attend elementary school in their mother tongue. As a result, the Romanian idiom from Eastern Serbia has remained archaic, lacking in scientific terminology, and is being used only 'at home'. This population, renowned for its ancient traditions, especially 'spells' and 'magic', is considered undeveloped. As language is closely related to cognition, the impression of 'backwardness' is only the result of their being deprived of literacy in their mothertongue. Being compelled to attend school in Serbian, this population has been largely assimilated by the majority Serbian one.

The parallel drawn between the linguistic and identity situation of the Romanian minority from Voivodina and the Romanian minority from Eastern Serbia reveals the important role politics plays in language and identity formation. For example, the Serbo-Croatian language does not officially exist anymore (R. Bugarski), and remained only a 'linguistic language' (although it is still practically spoken by the inhabitants of ex-Yugoslavia). The same goes for the Romanian idiom of Voivodina and Eastern Serbia, which remained linguistically the same Romanian language. As the Serbo-Croatian language dissipaded into various 'political dialects' (which bear the names of the newly-born states, resulted from the falling apart of ex-Yugoslavia), the Romanian idiom from Voivodina and from Eastern Serbia were also, practically, politically differenciated. Being deprived of the possibility to attend school in their mother tongue for so many decades, the Romanian population from Eastern Serbia has been lately 'rediscovered' with a 'new' linguistic and ethnic Serbian identity.

The recently published textbooks for the children of Eastern Serbia (as a consequence of the EU premises regarding minority populations rights) only maintain and reflect the artificially created opposition between Romanian as a *linguistic language* and the ‚new' *political dialects*, which are not the result of the falling apart of a country, but within the same country, by means of its cultural policy. This paper analyses the premises and consequences of this kind of discrimination in education in one's mother tongue, and the identity issues of these minority populations, whose mother tongue is the Romanian language.



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