50 Years Since the Western Publication of the Study *Rumänische Sprache und Literatur in Bessarabien und Transnistrien* by Klaus Heitmann

EUGENIA BOJOGA[1]

Klaus Heitmann's text *Rumänische Sprache und Literatur in Bessarabien und Transnistrien. Die sogenannte moldauische Sprache und Literatur Romanische Philologie* published 50 years ago in Germany marked the debut of an ample theoretical debate on the topic of "limba moldovenească" [the Moldovan language]. In my article I presented the importance of Haitmann's study, focusing on the language element, and on its echo within the linguistic historiography of the USSR, to this day part of the *Moldovenism* doctrine.

Key-words: *Moldavian language*, *Moldovenist doctrine*, *Soviet historiography*, *"harmonious bilingualism"*, *the theory of two different languages: Romanian and "Moldavian"*, *"Sovietologist"*

Five decades ago, the prestigious German journal "Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie" published a consistent and most objective and exciting study on the linguistic and cultural situation in the Soviet Socialist Moldova Republic of (now the Republic of Moldova) then one among the 15 union republics of USSR. Authored by Klaus Heitmann, Romance linguistics professor at the University of Heidelberg, the text would mark the debut of an ample theoretical debate on the topic of "limba moldovenească"[2] [the Moldovan language] (cf. Heitmann

[1] "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

[2] The debate could only be initiated during the 1988 to 1989, in full *perestrojka* and *glasnosti* epoch promoted by M. S. Gorbaciov. While the "language struggle" was successful, and the "Moldavan" language was declared a state language on 31 August

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1965). Albeit already tackled by several western[3] authors, K. Heitmann provided a deeper insight into, a more documented, and respectively, more definite claims on the matter. He analyzed the language and literary facts within the broader historic, political, social and cultural context, thus supplying the reader with a doublefold perspective on the issue, both synchronous and diachronic.

Instead, for the Soviet historiography of the time – let us remember this is the year 1965, in the midst of the Cold War – the title itself was outrageous, defying and anti-Soviet, and the main ideas forwarded were subversive. From the perspective of the then Soviet regime, the author's contentions were at discord with the official language policy, according to which the ethnic languages of the population enjoyed the equal rights of the Russian language, with the union republics using the local languages in parallel with Russian. The so-called tenets of "harmonious bilingualism" and of the "thriving of all [ethnic] languages" across the vast Soviet territory were only propaganda slogans, as the truth of the matter was that these languages were marginalised[4].

While K. Heitmann approached several aspects regarding the Romanian language and literature in Basarabia and Transnistria, in what follows I will proceed to an overall survey of his study, focusing on the language element, which actually stirred interest (and ensuing accusations), and on its echo within the linguistic historiography of the USSR, to this day part of the *Moldovenism* doctrine.

1989, the language controversy continues to this day, as The Constitution of The Republic of Moldova still uses in Art. 13 the old "limbă moldovenească" [Moldovan language] syntagm .

[3] It mainly refers to Lucien Laurat (1951), Arnold Kleess (1955) and Carlo Tagliavini (1958).

[4] On the marginal status of languages within the Soviet republics see Gary C. Fouse (2000).

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Rumänische Sprache und Literatur in Bessarabien und Transnistrien. Die sogenannte moldauische Sprache und Literatur

As it addressed the western lay public, the author started with the historical account of the space under scrutiny. The choice for Basarabia itself bore an emphatic anti-Soviet connotation: he was referring to the *inter-bellum* period when the area between the rivers Prut and Dniester were part of Large Romania. He explicitly mentions that Basarabia is, historically speaking, a Romanian territory and its inhabitants, although calling themselves Moldovans, are Romanian speakers in fact. The explanation for such a situation is that, in 1812, Russia "occupied, on no juridical grounds, the entire eastern region of the former Principality of Moldavia", from "the Prut to the Dniester, and ruled it for a century"[5] (Heitmann 1998: 8).

Most objective and thorough in his claims, the author demonstrates that the cultural policy of the Russian Empire was not at all congenial to the development of the Romanian language and culture in the area:

> ... throughout the 19th century, which was decisive to the structuring of the European languages and national consciousness, Basarabia and Transnistria were autonomous. The Union and the inauguration of the Romanian state, its introduction to French culture, as well as the emphatically western orientation of the Romanian language, the enthusiastic preservation of the Latin heritage over the Slavic and Oriental languages, the abolition of the Cyrillic alphabet: all but barely affected the Romanians in the tsarist empire (Heitmann 1998: 11).

Consequently, in 1918, when the Basarabians were politically liberated, with their written variety under the strong influence of speech, the latter archaic and full of Slavonic/Russian lexic, and in Cyrillic script, was distinct from the variety spoken in the Kingdom (*ibidem*: 11). Maintaining its dialectal status, and lagging behind as obsolete in comparison to

[5] Henceforth we shall be citing the Romanian translation of the study title (cf. Heitmann 1998).

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standard Romanian, its condition becomes disastrous[6]. In order to justify his contentions, Heitmann quotes D. Caracostea, who, two centuries after the 1918 Union, notes that the

> Basarabian dialect is the Moldovan dialect of the former century, unvarnished by the developments of the mutual language (Caracostea 1941: 278).

In support of his strong arguments regarding the Russification and denationalisation undergone, K. Heitmann points to the following fact: the great Basarabian patriots who had voted for the union with Romania in the Country Council, found it difficult to speak their mothertongue, as the latter had been banned from all walks of life, it had subsequently deteriorated, and had been replaced by Russian. Moreover, from an identity perspective:

> in what regards their national consciousness, the nationalist Basarabians and Transnistrians, they were not called Romanians, but Moldovans, mentioning at all times their Moldovan lot and the Moldovan language (Heitmann 1998: 11).

Most perceptive, the author notes that "in what regards the major part of the Basarabian people, apparently, in 1918, they generally had no sense of national unity". Indeed, following 106 years of forced assimilation, national consciousness could not possibly be a Basarabian national asset. He goes on to show the cause for this desynchronisation, pointing out that Basarabia and Transnistria had not experienced the 19th century of nationhood. This historically given fact will constitute the starting point for his argumentation, and has remained valid to this day.

As regards the subsequent developments, Heitmann indicates that during the *inter-bellum*, while Basarabia was part of Romania, the Soviet regime created the Moldovan republic in Transnistria:

[6] L. Colesnic-Codreanca would later demonstrate that the Romanian language had been banned from use in all domains, and had been replaced by Russian (cf. Colesnic-Codreanca 2003: 18).

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> The Soviet Union created the Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Moldova – a state formation founded for the local population,– as a component of the Soviet Ukraine. This was intended as a final acknowledgement of the independence of the Romanian minority within the Russian union of states and may have marked a definite progress (Heitmann 1998: 8).

The setting up of the Moldovan republic in 1924 also bore a different significance. The ARSSM was supposed to maintain the interest for Basarabia, as Moscow had never renounced its claims over it, says the author. Moreover, it was considered to be the embryo for a future Soviet Romania, a craddle for Soviet Romania, as it had been named at the very moment of its creation[7]. Part of the expectations came true when the USSR, through its infamous ultimatum of June, 1940, and then throughout the War year of 1944, retrieved everything it had lost in 1918 (*ibidem*: 9).

The future fate of the Romanians in the USSR, according to the author, would be dictated by the politics "carried out over the years of dislocating the Moldovans to the newly explored regions of Asian USSR", that is to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

As such, K. Heitmann supplied the western readership with an ample tableau of the Basarabian realities. The current situation of the area was presented against the backdrop of its proximal past, which contributed to outlining the larger picture of the realities depicted and analyzed. Yet, it is this very historic survey of Basarabia that was occulted by the then Soviet historiography, which regarded the *inter-bellum* period as one

[7] Prof. Heitmann's claims of 1965 have been confirmed by recent studies and research: "The A.R.S.S.M. was created for political reasons, to warrant the claims of USSR on Basarabia, the latter united with Romania in 1918 (...). Despite the Soviet propaganda trying to pass the new state formation for a major achievement by the Soviet national policy, the warrantee for the creation of the A.R.S.S.M. was doubtful on account of the following: the Romanians constituted only 31.5% of the total demographics of the A.R.S.S.M., and by 1924, on the territory included in the A.R.S.S.M. there had been no Romanian schools, there had circulated no Romanian newspaper, and the administration and church language had been either Russian or Ukrainean" (Gribincea et al. 2004: 6–7).

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of "Romanian bourgeois and gentry landly occupation", and depicted it in somber shades and negative terms.

The theory of two different languages: Romanian and "Moldovan"

As regards the language spoken in Basarabia and Transnistria, by then the theory of two distinct languages had already been in place: i.e. Moldovan and Romanian. Before language policy and planning were to become a subdomain of Sociolinguistics, K. Heitmann had an insight into the fact that:

> The history of the interpretation and preservation of the standard language in Moldova, as of the 1920's to the present, has registered a set of interestingly alternative attempts at creating bigger or smaller differences compared to the vernacular Romanian spoken in Romania, which was accomplished, on the one hand, through efforts at marking more or less the independent trait of the Moldovan language, and on the other hand, by practically lending to the standard language some verbal, usual and Russian touches[8] (*ibidem*: 12).

As regards the overall linguistic situation, he proposes a rigorous periodisation of the history of the *Moldovan* language, estblishing six stages in its becoming.

Thus, in the first stage – 1924–1928 – the linguistic separatism was relative, and its vantage point for cultural edification was the Romanian language, "which is richer in words" (*Plugarul roş*). Given that the "Moldovan dialect" lacked expressive and stylistic potential, "it was decided that in schools, homes and Moldovan cultural institutions the language used would be Romanian". Alhough the decision was made to

[8] See the relevant remarks by Eugeniu Coşeriu vis-a-vis the founding strategy for an alleged Moldovan language: "the rural spoken varieties of the Republic of Moldova were compared to the standard language in Romania, and subsequently claimed not to coincide. The procedure, however, is incorrect, for spoken varieties should be compared amongst themselves". The term itself: *Moldovan*, does not stand at the same semantic level as *Romanian*: the term simply designating a subdialect of the Dacian-Roman dialect, the latter being the foundation of Standard Romanian, and standing in the specific-to-generic notion ratio to the Romanian language (cf. Coseriu 2005: 127).

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switch to Latin graphics, the *Romanophile* tendency came under the attack of its political adversaries, who were reluctant to any borrowing whatsoever from the bourgeois Kingdom, be they purely linguistic[9], as K. Heitmann indicates.

Within the second stage – 1928–1932 – the first attempts are recorded at forming an autochthonous *Moldovan* language. The endeavour entailed breaking all ties with the Romanian language and literature, thus displaying a "tendency towards absolute linguistic autarchy". With a view to elaborate the *Moldovan* language, L. Madan elevated to Standard language the local features of the archaic spoken Moldovan, the latter isolated from the modernising process undergone in the latter half of the 19th by the Romanian language across the Prut. In his "Gramatică moldoveneascî" [Moldovan Grammar] of 1929[10] he wrote the following:

> Limba moldoveneascî, trăgându-sî în trecutu dipărtat din mesticătura linghii Dacilor (Gheţâlor) cu limba norodnicî latineascî, în curgirea multor veacuri s-o schimbat sub înrâurirea linghilor a multor noroadi (hoţâi, gunii, bulgarii, avarii, slavenii-ulucii, ungurii, pecenejâi, poloviţâi, tătarii, polecii, turcii, grecii-fanarioţi, ucrainenii, ruşii ş.a.), cu cari o avut atingiri norodu moldovnesc, şi s-o prifăcut într-o limbă diosăghitî di celilanti linghi romani şî di alti linghi a noroadelor megieşî, în cari limbă amu mulţimea cuvintilor îi din rădăcini latineşti şî slavineşti (Madan 1929).

The third period (1933–1937) unfolds under the mark of the incipient "Latinisation"[11], a return to the Romanian language and Latin graphics. Kl. Heitmann indicates that the new language policy requested that it reapproached the norms of Standard Romanian. However, the orientation did not last:

[9] Details regarding linguistic debates during the Communist International on the subject of the *Moldovan* language can be found in a former study (Bojoga 2015: 162–182).

[10] According to Ch. King, L. Madan's *Gramatica* [Grammar] represents "the most radical attempt at creating a distinct Moldovan language, completely different from Standard Romanian" (King 2002: 59).

[11] "Latinisation" meant, at the time, the return to Standard Romanian, its norms and to Romanian Literature (cf. Gribincea et al.).

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> By the late 30's, the Russian-Soviet nationalism had started expanding, which should have changed during and after the war period. As regards Moldova, neither of the following strains were deemed acceptable: neither Madanism, nor Latinism. The cause was one and the same – both seemed to alienate the Moldovan language from the neighbouring Slavic languages, to be more precise, from Russian (Heitmann 1998: 14).

Stage IV – 1937–1950 – coincided with the annexation of Basarabia and the formation of RSSM. The Soviet Language Policy marked a radical shift: if previously it had related to a populace of 200, 000, as of 1940, it became mandatory for 2 millions, with more serious consequences. The official claim was that the Moldovan language, due to containing a considerable number of Slavonic lexical items (Russian and Ukrainean), was a Slavo-Romance variety that would gradually turn into a purely Slavic language (*ibidem*: 15).

The elaboration of linguistic norms for the *Moldovan* language was the mission of I.D. Ceban, who grounded his activity on the class trait principle, according to which "Standard Romanian belonged to the bourgeois superstructure, hostile to the working class and the peasants, and consequently not deemed a model for the *Moldovan* language" (*ibidem*: 15)[12].

Stage V – 1950–1955 – represents a continuation of the previous one, as it implements the foolish idea promoted by I. Ceban of "cleansing the language of the Frenchified Romanian words, unintelligible to the Moldovan lot". However,

> This fantasy gave in to reason when, after the publication of Stalin's works in 1950, Soviet linguistics, which had been under the influence of N.J. Marr, along with Romanistics, found sure footing. And after the Moldovan language was acknowledged once again as a Romance

[12] In the Preface to his orthographic dictionary entitled *Cuvântelnic orfografic moldovinesc*, I. D. Ceban claimed: "Colectivul de avtori s'a pus ca ţeli la munca sa să curăţă limba moldovneascî di cuvintili româneşti franţuziti, neînţălesî de norodu moldovnesc, întrodusî cândva de duşmanii norodului, şi în rând cu aiasta s'a străuit să apuşe cât mai multe cuvinte întrati în traiu norodului moldovnesc în legătură cu zădirea soţialistă, ca neologhizme, din lindjile noroadelor frăţeşti rusască şi ucraineascâ. Cu o fereală s'au purtat avtorii către cuvintele şelea, care nu-s tare răspândite, sfădoase ori tjiar născoşite de oameni osădiţi prin cabinete" (Ceban 1940: 5).

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> language, the age of great historical rambling came to an end (Heitmann 1998: 18).

It was not until the final stage, which in Professor Heitmann's chronology starts in 1956 and stretches beyond 1965, the year his article was published, that a gradual approach to Romanian can be recorded, although admitting one identity for the two languages at the time was impossible and downright dangerous. He notes the change in attitude of the Soviet language policy as regards tolerance to, and even the promotion of language cultivation: the elaboration of quality textbooks and dictionaries. This is when his first critical articles are issued pointing to the "deliberate impoverishment of the possibilities of our language" (I. Vasilenco) after 1945.

Prof. Heitmann's pertinent claim at the time which contradicted the official tenet of the "thriving languages", was that the language of Basarabia competed with Russian, and its "expressive functions were visibly limited".

To contend, the author depicted the language spoken in Soviet Moldova as follows:

> this is, as accounted for by the historical context, the Romanian language, that is, the Moldovan variety of the Romanian language spoken in most of Northern Romania just as in RSSM. It is different from Standard Romanian, founded on all accounts on the southern dialect – Valach – mainly through pronunciation and vocabulary (Heitmann 1998: 10).

But while all these differences, as well as others, are insignificant, the Heidelberg linguist went on, for the past 40 years the tenet was circulated in Soviet Moldova that the Moldovan language was distinct from Romanian.

> This opinion is rather paradoxical. It's as if within Italian, one could distinguish a separate Tesina, within French – a separate Wallon. The reasons why this language was conceived of as separate were obviously prevailingly political in nature: this fact should be understood mainly as an action against Romanian irredentism, still very much viable to this day, and against the *bourgeois-gentry* Romanian system (Heitmann 1998: 10–11).

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Reception of K. Heitmann's study during the Soviet period

Thorough and nonpartisan, K. Heitmann's study, a most objective radiography of the *status quo*, had a powerful negative impact. Although it approached several issues – the history of Basarabia, its culture and literature, the most criticised elements were the linguistic ones. Most naturally so, since at the time of its publication – in 1965 – the language issue was most sensitive. Unsurprisingly, the Soviet linguists denied the author's claims, labelling him a "representative of the anti-communist party", an author in the service of the "bourgeois ideology machinery" who "feels no remorse even when distorting the truth" (Vartician et al. 1974: 137), a "Sovietologist"[13] and an "ill-wisher of the Moldovan language" (Stati 1988: 100).

At the time, the main remonstrance against the German Romance linguist was "his apparent ill-intended political platform", and his "not doing his best to scrutinise from every perspective the essence of the phenomena and facts bearing on the matter, in all of its complexity" (Vartician et al. 1974: 135). Secondly, K. Heitmann was blamed for "not taking wholly into account the evidence of facts", not probing into the "essence of the real correlation between Moldovan and Romanian as national languages":

> K. Heitmann clings to his *a priori* notion and definitely calls Romanian the language spoken in Soviet Moldova. An important clarification of his attitude towards Soviet reality is his not using the

[13] The truth is that K. Heitmann was introduced in the infamous category of "bourgeois Sovietologists", the most criticised and blamed category of foreign exegetes, who approached the Soviet realities in a critical and objective way, on account of which they were called "ill-wishers". In fact, Soviet historiography comprises several studies on the issue. Here is, for example, the title of such a volume: *Limba moldovenească şi răuvoitorii ei. Împotriva falsificatorilor burgheji ai dezvoltării limbii moldoveneşti* [The Moldovan language and its ill-wishers. Against the bourgeois distorters of the development of the Moldovan language] (cf. Stati 1988).

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> term the Moldovan SSR but rather operating with the "Basarabia and Transnistria" denominations (*ibidem*: 135).

Thirdly, the German linguist was accused of referring too often to the Moldovan philologists by quoting insignificant excerpts and fragmentary opinions, the majority of which are not essential. The contention of the Chişinău linguists was hard, but in line with the spirit of the times:

> In fact, however, the authors themselves of the works mentioned were pursuing obvious and certified Soviet political goals. This clearly derives from K. Heitmann's very claims about the "Romanian population on either side of the Prut not coming to terms with the Act of 1940" (*ibidem*: 137).

34 years later, the German linguist falls once again under the attack of an ideologist of *Moldovenism*, that is, Vasile Stati, who produces an "overall evaluation" of the 1965 essay:

> It is a study with great following in the Republic of Moldova in the 70–80's of the 20th century. While apparently well documented, (within his 233 notes, K. Heitmann refers to an amazingly wide range of authors, who don't recall ever having written anything about the Moldovan languge), his study of undisputable scientific rigour does not overstep the conceptual margins of the politically expansionist Romanian view of the Moldova between the Prut and the Dniester, on the Moldovan nation and language (Stati 2008: 214–215).

Given that the two linguistic angles were totally opposite, K. Heitmann's attitude was qualified as „a hostile political attack", elaborated from an "evident anti-Soviet standpoint".

Conclusions

In *Rumänische Sprache und Literatur in Bessarabien und Transnistrien. Die sogenannte moldauische Sprache und Literatur*, the most consistent of all studies published by the 80's, the author supplied an objective and pertinent survey of the sociolinguistic condition of the Romanian language in

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Basarabia, indicating for the first time in the West the "genesis" of the alleged Moldovan language. With much philological accuracy, the exhaustive documentation is the author's greatest assets. In spite of the pertinent observations of the German linguist not being agreeable to the then regime, since they were not in accordance with the official tenets of the Soviet regime and the language policy pursued by the USSR within the territory between the Prut and the Dniester, K. Heitmann's study created a breach in the official language policy of Chişinău, preparing the ground for the radical changes of the 80–90's, which partially resulted in the victory of the Romanian language[14]. Most assuredly so, since the moment of its publication, the study became a landmark, with the author's detractors and sympathisers equally relating to it[15].

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[14] We say "partially", because the Constitution of the Moldovan Republic, in its famous Article 13, still uses the obsolete syntagm of "the Moldovan language", as the attempts at substituting the correct one – the Romanian language – have been so far unsuccessful. More details in Bojoga (2013, 2015).

[15] Even his fierce linguistic adversaries of the Soviet period, such as S. Berejan, woud assert later that they were compelled to do so at the indications of the party activists in the Republic. The same linguist in Chişinău would qualify K. Heitmann as "a Romance linguist of worlwide notoriety, most knowledgeable of the situation of the Romanian language in the former Moldovan RSS" (cf. Berejan 2007: 85).

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