The Language Community: Traditional Linguistic Communities in the Western Romania

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Abstract:
The language community creates a universe defined in terms of social analysis where linguistic phenomena reflect general rules of behavior. Most groups with certain stability – both small groups related through direct contact and modern nations, divided into smaller sub regions or professional associations and small local groups − can be considered as language communities if they present language features that demand a special study. Verbal behavior of such groups always represents a system. Communication of referential information means grammar, while communication of social information implicates a correlative systematic variation in the structure of language and in the social structure. The Western part of our country shows a distinct mosaic of linguistic communities who have contributed in preserving spiritual and cultural identity of ethnic minorities. Spiritual and cultural identity means *language* and *tradition*, preserved in various types of *language communities*.

Keywords: language community, bilingualism, acculturation, linguistic influence, linguistic code

Language communities were considered either cultural areas, closely linked to commercial and traffic areas, or as small urban groups, or as immigrant groups.

J.J. Gumperz states that the notion of *linguistic community* defines *any human community which is characterized by regular and frequent interaction between its members, through a common corpus of verbal signs and which is distinguished from similar communities by significant differences in language use.* There are both monolingual and *bi-* or multilingual communities (*apud* Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 16).

Linguistic variations can be traced both at the individual level and at the level of language communities. Individuals are distinguished by the way they use language; this mode varies over time. In order to designate the inventory of the verbal skills of an individual in a certain period of his life, the notion of *idiolect* is used. It can be said that in the course of life, an individual uses several *idiolects*. The mobility of

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idiolects is determined by aspects related to the speaker's biography (education, profession etc.), as well as by the actual process of verbal interaction, which involves contact between *idiolects*. The last aspect led R. Jakobson to state that the notion of *idiolect* represents, to a certain extent, a deceptive fiction: each individual tends to adapt, consciously or not, his own way of expressing himself to that of his interlocutors, so that the interference between *idiolects* is continuous. According to Jakobson, there is *no private property in language, everything is socialized* (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 17).

As stated by E. Haugen (Haugen, 1971: 9-10), the transition from *idiolect* to *sociolect* reflects the transition from psychology to sociology. Unlike the *idiolect*, which has a strictly individual character, the *sociolect* is the basic unit, recognized at the level of the linguistic community. The *sociolect* is a minimal, uniform code, defined by the set of common features of the *idiolects* of the members of a certain community and unrecognized in the speech of the members of other communities.

In many communities, each language is functionally specialized (it is used to discuss certain topics, for certain purposes, and by certain people) (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 21).

Bilinguals are said *to build bridges between verbal communities*. Some researchers have even compared them to *the marginal man* that sociologists talk about.

Bilinguals represent *bridge communities* (Ch. Hockett), with the role of mediating the relationship between the communities themselves (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 22).

Fast-changing societies typically present the gradual transition between speech styles or, when the community is bilingual, a series of intermediate varieties that make the transition between extremes. The concrete effect of bilingualism on a person's speech varies depending on certain factors, some of which can be called extralinguistic, because they are beyond the structural differences between languages or even their lexical deficiencies. The speaker's ease of verbal expression and his ability to maintain two distinct languages, his relative proficiency in each language and his attitude towards them, are just a few extralinguistic factors relevant to the study of interference (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 23).

Europe at the beginning of the 21st century has become an increasingly multilingual continent due to the influence of emigrants and refugees around the world.

According to recent surveys, about half of Europe's population is already multilingual and 44% of European citizens can communicate in a language other than their mother tongue.

In most contacts between groups that speak different mother tongues, the groups constitute, at the same time, distinct ethnic or cultural communities. Such contact produces phenomena of *biculturalism* (participation in two cultures), as well as *bilingualism*, the diffusion of cultural features, as well as linguistic elements.

Situations of concordance of contact between cultures and languages generate *lexical-cultural interferences*.

One type of cultural difference, namely religious difference, often coincides − alone or in combination with other types − with a division into mother tongues. In Switzerland there are bilingual communities in which the distinction between mother tongues does not coincide with any other cultural difference, apart from one of confession (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 96).

The difference in religion acts as a more important obstacle than the linguistic one for the integration of communes, so that, in bilingual communes, but of the same denomination, the contact of the two mother tongue groups is considerably closer. In general, a villager is more aware of his neighbor's confession than of his mother tongue. Mixed marriages are quite rare, and daily activities are separated by confession.

Most groups with a certain stability, be they small groups linked by direct contact, modern nations, divisible into smaller subregions or even professional associations and small local groups − can be considered as *speaking communities*, if they have linguistic features that are suitable a special study. The verbal behavior of such groups is always a system. It must be based on a finite number of grammatical rules, which underlie the production of correctly formed sentences, because otherwise the messages would be unintelligible (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chițoran, 1975: 103).

The communication of referential information presupposes the existence of a grammar, and the communication of social information presupposes the existence of a systematic correlative variation of the language structure and of the social structure.

Where two or more speech communities maintain prolonged contact within a wide field of communication, there are intersecting diffusion currents.

The influence between cultures can also give rise to the change of *linguistic code*: the abandonment of one mother tongue in favor of another. This phenomenon occurs most frequently when two groups are mentioned, as in the case of cultural absorption, or when minority groups take over the culture of the surrounding majority.

The totality of the dialectal variants and of the superimposed ones that are used regularly in a community form the *verbal repertoire* of this community. Whether or not the boundaries of a language may coincide

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with those of a social group, verbal repertoires are always specific to certain populations (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chiţoran, 1975: 111).

The concept of *linguistic range* refers to the internal linguistic distance between the constituent variations, ie to the total amount of purely linguistic differentiation existing in a community, thus distinguishing *multilingual, multidialectal* and *homogeneous communities* (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chiţoran, 1975: 112).

When social change destroys social and traditional structures and forms new connections as in the case of urbanization and colonization, language barriers between communities are also destroyed.

Some researchers view language communication within a verbal community as an *interconnected system of subcodes* (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chiţoran, 1975: 114).

E. Sapir disregards the effect of the social environment and considers natural evolution (*drift*) as the main factor in determining the structural features of a language.

The *language community* is defined as a social group, monolingual or multilingual, welded due to the frequency of patterns of social interaction and separated from the surrounding areas due to poor communication possibilities. Language communities can be made up of small groups linked by direct contact or they can cover large regions, depending on the level of abstraction we want to achieve.

Social communication within a linguistic community can be considered in terms of functionally linked *roles*, defined, after Nadei, *as modes of action attributed to individuals in a society* (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chiţoran, 1975: 115).

The totality of communication roles in a society can be called its *communication matrix*. We define the *code matrix* as the set of codes and subcodes functionally linked to the *communication matrix* (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chiţoran, 1975: 116).

The nature of the *code matrix* components varies from community to community. In some, all components are dialects or styles of the same language. We call these *subcodes*. In others, the matrix also includes genetically distinct languages, which cannot be called *codes*. The distinction between *code* and *subcode* is linguistic: it does not necessarily correspond to a difference in social function (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Chiţoran, 1975: 117).

Located in the Western part of Romania, Arad was endowed both geographically and historically with a spiritual destiny of confluences, ethnic and religious interferences, meant to harmonize ideas, feelings or beliefs over time. The sometimes sinuous evolution of these "encounters" describes a map of a discreet feeling, with a unique flavor, that of *being together*. This feeling becomes the spiritual coordinate of a

space designed as if for self-knowledge and self-discovery, for the discovery of identity in otherness.

Arad – as a city and as a county – has always been multiethnic and multireligious, and the relationship between the different groups has been cordial. The elders, especially from the smaller localities, tell with tenderness how they eagerly awaited the holidays of the other ethnic groups, to which they were always invited, receiving gifts, tasting specific dishes. However, tense moments were not lacking, whether it is the Second World War, or the more recent events, after the Revolution of '89, when the spirits were heated by the claims, justified or not, of some groups with radical thinking.

Referring strictly to the Arad area, we notice that the status or perception of *being a foreigner* is closely related to a certain era by creating a social, political and economic background. Therefore, *being a foreigner* in interwar Arad is not the same as *being a foreigner* in the Arad of the '80ˢ or in Arad from the post-December period. The status of a *foreigner* also implies the alienation of one's own being through the loss of the linguistic, cultural identity, of the roots that always remind you that you feed on the sap of the earth at home.

What did it mean to live in interwar Arad for a Hungarian, a German, a Jew or even an Italian? From the stories of parents and grandparents, there is an Arad with tabiets, with a warm atmosphere, with a rich cultural life in which concerts, theater and opera performances invited personalities belonging to different ethnicities (opera performances by Lia Hubic, concerts of pianists like Schwartz or Körösy). The mundane life of Arad at that time presupposed the traditional Sunday walk, when socialization and good relations were unhindered. Merchandise markets, shopping streets were spaces where both the Romanian merchant and the Hungarian, German, Serbian or Jewish merchant were part of the picturesque place, in a cordial atmosphere. The era is marked by the pulse of the *traditional communities* that make up the linguistic, religious and cultural mosaic of Arad.

The *traditional communities* of Arad from the interwar period until the Revolution of '89 are: the Hungarian community, the Jewish community, the German community and the Serbian community. We can say that precisely this ethnic, religious and cultural variety has fixed the personality of Arad in the landscape of the Western area. The same ethnic groups are found in the mentioned period both in Arad County and in the Western area, with certain accents on regions, which gave uniqueness to each.

These *traditional communities* have evolved over time, have been influenced by various social, political and economic factors, have been effervescent or just resisted, but have not been lost, have not

disintegrated, despite the aging of their members, of the roller coaster of communism, of emigration and, currently, of globalization. So we can speak of certain vitality, of a permanence of these communities, and their continuity was maintained by preserving the *language, customs* and *traditions*.

The Serbian community, having as its *axis mundi* the *Serbian Church* in the *Serbian Square*, perpetuates the traditions, celebrates Christmas and New Year according to the old calendar, an opportunity for all generations to meet, as the elderly and young enjoy together, the latter taking over and learning customs.

Also interesting are the communities of Slovaks (Nădlac) or the community of Bulgarians from Vinga, the latter being identified by the imposing Catholic Church that watches over the settlement.

The negative experience of the politically generated conflicts deeply marked, unfortunately, the village universe of the county, the elderly there telling sad, sometimes disturbing stories created by the conflict Catholicism *vs.* Orthodoxy, Hungarian language *vs.* Romanian language etc. However, a kind of compensation has always worked by balancing these communities that have managed to balance themselves, to *re*-establish that state *of being together*.

With the establishment of communism, this local perfume and color began to fade, the distinct individuals of different communities going through an aggressive process of dissolution in favor of imposing *uniformity* and *uniform*. A significant part of the Hungarians and Jews had already left that *at home*, going abroad, experiencing from another perspective the status of *being a foreigner*.

The Germans in the German community of Aradul Nou oriented their destiny towards Germany, some Hungarians and Jews in Hungary, the USA or Israel, but they left indelible memories and traditions. Buildings, holiday customs and culinary customs have all been preserved in this space, in the soul and the spiritual memory of these places.

The post-December period experienced at one point an intense emotion of *coming back home*, of recovery, Hungarians, Germans, and Jews, who left once, waiting for the coagulation of the old communities. Thus, some communities restructured their nucleus, accepting *the new* brought by those who had once left the womb.

Currently, Arad has become *home* to other ethnic groups that bring a new, even exotic note to the patriarchal city. We refer here to the population of Chinese and Arab origin who carry out mainly commercial activities. The children of these families attend the classes of the Arad schools; learn the Romanian language, Romanian customs and traditions. These *new communities* raise the issue of their integration

from a cultural perspective, celebrations, festivities, shows held by members on the occasion of traditional holidays being so discreet that they go unnoticed.

Traditional communities meet the *modern communities* of the city and region, the Italian community, the Chinese community or the Arab community being present as a result of the dynamics brought about by the opening after the Revolution of '89, as well as by globalization. The Italian community is not for Arad or for the Western area, an absolutely new presence, the Italians finding a purpose in the city on Mureș river and in other cities or localities in the West during the interwar period, too, when, like other communities, identified with certain guilds, crafts or commercial activities.

From the point of view of the existence of these communities after the Revolution of '89, the county and the city of Arad are in a long process of recovery, of search in which they try to give back to Arad what has always been its: the brilliance of diversity, the joy of being together, of knowing different existential formulas.

Regarding the various cults that are present in Arad, we can speak of a very wide range: Orthodox, Catholic, Greek Catholic, Protestant or Mosaic, most of them being found in a certain linguistic identity, namely: Romanian, Hungarian, German, Serbian, Bulgarian or Hebrew. It is well known that these cults coexisted harmoniously, finding in Arad a generous space for manifestation. Not only the languages and traditions specific to these cults have created a special landscape, but also the architecture of the places of worship is a defining one for Arad. The buildings of the Catholic Church, the Red Church or the New Orthodox Cathedral stand next to that of the Neolog Synagogue or the Serbian Church, all architectural jewels, witnesses of a long tradition. From an architectural point of view, the *Serbian Square* is another hidden treasure of Arad, a rich history reflected in the buildings that make up the old part of the city.

In the interwar period, until the '50s and' 60s, the beneficial coexistence of these cults was transposed at all levels of human relations, the neighbors belonging to different denominations giving traditional dishes or practicing certain customs (Catholic boys coming to sprinkle perfume on girls belonged to other denominations, Jewish children brought Easter to Orthodox or Catholic schools). Mixed marriages, Romanian-Hungarian, Romanian-German, Romanian-Slovak etc. were an opportunity to exchange or adopt traditions, customs of all kinds, as well as to increase the number of bilingual or multilingual speakers.

Understanding what is new or different requires, first of all, an effort to accept the other, then knowledge that can be achieved through direct contact with the traditions, the culture of these communities

whose identity seeks a well-deserved place in the Arad landscape. Art performances, exhibitions, book launches, presentation of traditions and customs of these communities, various holidays and events held within the groups, ethnic groups mentioned, but with a wide openness to the outside is a chance to optimize the process of *acceptance, knowledge* and *understanding*. It is a journey as exciting and complicated as that of self-knowledge, a *sine qua non* condition of knowing the other. However, accepting differences requires an exercise of will and generous love, the renunciation of prejudices and the integration of one's own being into universality.

Communication, regardless of the form worn, is meant to bring the joy of discovering the other, the awareness of the multitude of facets of the local specificity of Arad. This dialogue of self-rediscovery restores to this area of the West the initial dimension of an ethnic, linguistic, spiritual and cultural plurality in a *value*-generating harmony.

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