

ROLES OF THE POLISH, RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN LANGUAGES IN THE POLISH DIASPORA IN MOLDOVA

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Abstract

According to a survey, representatives of the Polish diaspora are mostly Russian speakers. 69% of the surveyed acquired Russian at home, while only 25.3% learned Romanian, and 22.9% - Polish, from their parents. Research on the declared knowledge of these three languages indicates the overwhelming predominance of Russian, known by all respondents, mostly on a very good and good level. The survey has shown that daily communication proceeds mostly in Russian, and the studied population has a positive or neutral attitude towards it. Russian is the first language for Polish people in Moldova. The level of Romanian language knowledge is much lower: 9.4% of respondents did not know the official language of the country of which they were citizens, and the respondents' attitude towards the language is mostly neutral or negative. Responses indicated contact with Romanian in state institutions, everyday life, with family and friends and when communication in Russian was impossible. Polish was liked the most among the surveyed languages, and it is acquired mainly in courses of Polish as a foreign language and the speakers' level is close to that of Romanian. According to responses, Polish was mostly used among other Poles in Moldova, in the Catholic Church and during trips to Poland.

Keywords: *foreign language, mother tongue, multilingualism, native language, L1/L2/L3.*

1. INTRODUCTION

On the basis of the last census carried out in Moldova in 2004¹, except for the region of Transnistria, the vast majority, that is 75% of the citizens of Moldova, declared Moldovan nationality, Ukrainians make up 8.3%, Russians 5.9%, Gagauzians 4.3%, Romanians 2.2% and Bulgarians 1.9%. Nationalities other than those enumerated above were declared by 1% of the surveyed society and it includes Poles, whose number reached 2383. As far as the declared native language of the citizens of Moldova is concerned, the following data was obtained:

Moldovan – 60%, Romanian – 16.5%, Russian – 11.2%, Ukrainian – 5.5%, Gagauzian – 4%, Bulgarian – 1.6%, other language – 0.6%. A separate section is constituted by percentage data concerning commonly used languages – and here the Russian language makes up slightly more, that is 16.5% of all languages.

The Polish diaspora in Moldova uses Polish, Russian, Romanian, Ukrainian and other languages – it is thereby a multilingual and multicultural society. In this dissertation I analyzed 3 main languages used in the Polish diaspora in Moldova: Polish, Russian and Romanian, which in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova is called the Moldovan language, the official language². The main areas in Moldova where Poles live are: Chişinău, Bălţi, Stircea-Glodei, Grigorăuca, Soroca, as well as Comrat in Gagauzia, Rîbniţa and Slobozia-Raşcov in the Transnistria region, and those places I reached with my questionnaires.

I conducted the survey research on trilingualism of the Polish-Russian-Romanian Polish diaspora in Moldova from September to December of 2012, in the previously mentioned centres of Polish immigrants in Moldova, both among those who studied Polish in schools and universities and in Polish community and church organizations. As a result of the research I gathered 300 questionnaires, from which 297 served as material for analysis. Analyzing the survey data allows finding answers for questions concerning the level of language knowledge of the respondents regarding Polish, Russian and Romanian, social conditioning of using those three language and attitudes of the respondents towards the languages, as well as respondents'

opinions about used languages and roles they play in lives of the community's representatives. Quantitative research has been complemented with the method of researcher participation, conducted in the period of over three years of my work as a Polish as a foreign language teacher in the Moldova State University (Universitatea de Stat din Moldova) in Chişinău.

The group of questioned respondents is of diversified age. The youngest respondent was 8 years old, the oldest – 81 years old. The most numerous group (38%) consisted of 113 people aged 8-19 years and included mainly students of the so-called Polish forms, 61 people (20%) were aged 20-30 years; in both age groups of 31-40 and 41-50 there were 39 respondents (13%). 15 (5%) of the questioned were people aged 51-60 years, and the oldest group (10%) were 28 people aged 61-81 years.

Among the respondents, 204 people were women (69%), and 93 – men (31%). As far as country of birth is concerned, 258 (87%) of the questioned answered Moldova, 15 (5%) – Ukraine, and 7 (2.4%) had been born in Russia. Among the questioned there were also people born in Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Germany, Poland and the United States of America.

2. ROLES OF THE POLISH, RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN LANGUAGES

To define roles played by the researched languages in the community's life, the question about places of acquisition was used first. Data concerning the Polish language showed that only 68 respondents (22.9%) acquired the language at home, from parents and grandparents. 71 respondents (23.9%) learned the language at school, and to that group belonged mainly students of the so-called Polish forms in Secondary School named after M. Gogol in Chişinău. The biggest group, consisting of 184 respondents (61.9%), learned in a course of Polish as a foreign language. Such courses are available in four centres in Chişinău (organized at universities, a Polish community organization and the Catholic Church), in two institutions in Bălţi (as a part of university foreign language course and in Polish House) and in Stircea (in

Polish House), as well as in Comrat and Slobozia-Raşcov (as a part of a Polish community organization). Study of the Polish language is also made possible thanks to Polish government scholarships in the period of bachelor and master degree studies, as well as summer schools of Polish language and culture for those who study Polish in Moldovan university courses of foreign languages. 24 respondents, which makes up 8%, benefitted from the educational opportunities in Poland. 7 respondents (2.3%) mastered Polish during their stay in Poland for gainful employment.

In the case of the Russian language, far more respondents that in the case of Polish acquired the language at home. 205 people (69%) acquired Russian from their parents and grandparents. School as the place of the language acquisition chosen by 243 people (81.8%), which indicates that for that part of respondents choosing schools and forms with Russian as the language of instruction is common. 119 respondents (40%) took the opportunity of studying in Russian-speaking groups. 18 respondents (6%) learned Russian in courses of Russian as a foreign language, and 45 people (15.2%) acquired the language at work. The last answer, which indicates acquiring Polish in Russia or other Russian-speaking countries, was chosen by 35 respondents (11.8%).

As opposed to Russian, Romanian is an obligatory subject of teaching in Moldova, with the exception of the Transnistrian region, in which there is a possibility of choosing Ukrainian in state schools, and in public schools Romanian has the status of an optional language. It is reflected in the survey research results, according to which 218 respondents (73.4%) learned the language at school. Supposedly, to this group does not belong the oldest part of the questioned, who went to school in the days when Romanian was not yet an obligatory subject of teaching. Just as in the case of Polish, home is not a common place of acquiring the Romanian language. Only 75 respondents (25.3%) answered that they had acquired the language from their parents and grandparents. It is unusually few, if we consider the fact that it is the official language in the whole Moldova. 90 respondents (30.3%) learned the language during university studies, and courses

and working place were indicated by 40 people (13.5%) each. It must be said that the surveyed considered the level of Romanian teaching in schools very low. It is not taught as a second or foreign language but as a native language, only with low motivation of both teachers and Russian-speaking students. Finishing school, students usually do not know the language even in a basic extent, which causes problems when they try to find jobs in a Romanian-speaking environment. That explains why a part of the surveyed chose to attend a course of Romanian as a foreign language. The smallest group (4.7%) consists of the respondents who had contact with Romanian in Romania.

From the data presented above one can draw a conclusion that from among the three discussed languages, it is Russian that is acquired at home from household members. One can assume that it is the first language for most of the respondents. However, the possibility of simultaneous acquisition of the other two languages in mixed families is not precluded.

Next pieces of data concern the situation and place of use of the discussed languages. The most responses concerning use of the language among family members were obtained for Russian, because as many as 202 (68%), much fewer respondents talk to household members in Romanian – 53 (17.8%), and the fewest in Polish – 42 (14.1%). Strong predomination of the Russian language becomes prominent. In a school or academic environment Russian is used by 151 respondents (41%), Romanian by 135 (36.7%) and Polish by only 82 (22.3%). The number of respondents who use Russian and Romanian at school is similar, which stems from the fact that, as mentioned before, Romanian is an obligatory subject, and students from Russian-speaking homes learn in forms with Russian as the language of instruction, except those who learn with Polish as the language of instruction. As far as working place is concerned, most of respondents again referred to Russian, as many as 113 (50.4%), 91 (40.6%) representatives of the Polish diaspora spoke Romanian, and Polish only 20, which makes up 8.9%. From observation it follows that Russian-speaking people preferred working in an environment where they can communicate in that language. However, quite

a big part of the respondents uses Romanian or both languages at work. Using Polish there was surely indicated by those who work in church among the Polish diaspora representatives or had gained working experience in Poland. A big number of responses was obtained in the group of other situations and places. 94 (38.5%) of those respondents who had chosen Russian, explained they used the language in everyday life and everywhere, during social and Polish community reunions. In that same group of answers, 59 respondents (24.2%) wrote that they used Polish in a language course, during Polish community meetings, with Poles during visits in Poland and contact in the Internet, and in the Catholic Church. Responses of 91 (37.3%) of the questioned, concerning Romanian, are very diversified. There were answers indicating use of the language in state institutions, in everyday life, with acquaintances and friends, and when an interlocutor asked a question in Romanian and did not speak Russian. However, in this group the answer 'nowhere' predominated, which appeared 56 times. That shows the negligible range of the language, particularly among residents of southern Moldova – Gagauzia and the Slavic Transnistria. The data is surprising, if we take the official status of the Romanian language in this country into consideration.

Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that Russian is the dominant language, serving as the first language for a majority of the questioned. It is the language of communication at home, as well as school and academic environments, work and social reunions. The Romanian language, obligatory in schools, remains the spoken language in schools and universities. It also fulfils an important role as the official language in a public space. However, the number of people who do not use this language in any situation is surprising. The Polish language is used the least and rather sporadically – during Polish community meetings and in church, during visits in Poland and through the Internet. It is also a language taught at school, as in Secondary School in Chişinău or in Slobozia-Raşcov.

While enquired about their level of Polish, Russian and Romanian knowledge, respondents were also asked for subordinating a numerical scale from 0 to 5, describing the level of

acquaintance with all skills: listening and reading comprehension, speaking and writing. On that basis arithmetic average of values of knowledge for every language was obtained, and the values were depicted in a graph. It must be said that those are declared values, and as such they are subjective, not supported by proper competence tests. As predicted, respondents know Russian the best. As many as 252 of the surveyed (84.8%) declared to know the language very well, 32 people (10.7%) declared to know it well. Negligible percentage of respondents claimed to know Russian averagely (1.3%), similarly to the responses of poorly or very poorly – 0.7%. What is curious is that none of the surveyed claimed not to know the language at all. The Polish language knowledge, as assessed by respondents themselves, is much worse. Only 56 of them (18.9%) claimed to know Polish very well, and 85 (28.6%) declared to know it well, and this is the biggest value obtained for the Polish language. 75 people (25.3%) know Polish 'averagely', and 61 (20.5%) – 'poorly or very poorly'. 14 (4.7%) of the surveyed do not know Polish at all.

Results of the enquiry about Romanian are very similar. The most people – 99 (33.3%) responded they knew Romanian very well. Together with the decreasing level of the language knowledge, the number of responses also decreased. The following results were obtained: for a good level 64 (21.6%), average – 55 (18.5%), poor or very poor – 47 (15.8%). It is noteworthy that 28 (9.4%) respondents did not know the official language of the country where they live. Among the surveyed who gave that answer there were mainly people living in Gagauzia and Transnistria region, that is those regions where use of Romanian is the rarest and where Russian predominates. It should be thought over, what are the reasons of this situation. Important here is the fact that, as mentioned before, in the Transnistrian region Romanian is not an obligatory language taught in schools. Another reason is the low level of teaching it, in the respondents' opinion. A vital role is also played by the negative attitude towards Romanian, which is confirmed by statements of the surveyed.

Over 95% of people know Russian very well or well and it is the best acquired language

known by all respondents. Polish is known on the same level by only a half of the questioned, alike Romanian. Almost 5% of people do not know Polish and nearly a tenth part – Romanian at all.

The attitudes of respondents towards the Polish, Russian and Romanian languages is worthy of notice. The most positive attitude of the questioned is directed towards Polish, because as many as 248 people (83.5%) chose the proposed statement: 'I like it and I speak this language with pleasure or I want to know it – it is the language of my ancestors.' Respondents added that they learned Polish and used it with real pleasure, connecting knowing it with future studies and work in Poland. Also roots and cultural and religious heritage had not been forgotten. In the case of Russian, that answered was chosen by 155 people (52.2%), and for Romanian – 64 (21.5%). The statement: 'It is beautiful but I do not feel the need to know and use it' was chosen the most commonly for Romanian – 17.8%, for Polish it was 10.1%, and the fewest people chose it for Russian – 2.7%. The statement: 'It is the language of everyday communication – I just use it,' showing a neutral attitude to the language, was referred mostly to Russian (52.2%), which, as we remember, is the best known and the most commonly used language of the Polish diaspora in Moldova. Many respondents also claimed that it was their native language, which they had been speaking 'forever'. The second place was taken by Romanian with 27.3% of the surveyed, and the third – by Polish (8.4%). A clear aversion to the official language of their country was expressed by as many as 50 respondents (16.8%), to which belong mainly people from Gagauzia and Transnistria, and that is connected with the low level of acquaintance of the respondents with Romanian.

3. CONCLUSIONS

From the data presented above one can draw a conclusion that Russian is the first language of Poles in Moldova. In this language proceeds everyday communication and the surveyed population has a positive or neutral attitude towards it. Polish is a language which respondents

use mostly in Polish language courses and during Polish community meetings and in the Catholic Church. The Polish language has definitely the widest appeal among the researched languages, although the declared level of the language knowledge shows that mastery of it is limited. The level of Romanian language knowledge is similar to the level of Polish language knowledge, even though it is the official language. The attitude towards Romanian is mostly neutral; however, a part of respondents from the Gagauzian and Transnistrian regions, where the language is rather secondary, referred to it with an aversion. At the same time, respondents stress the need of learning and knowing the official language of the country of which they are citizens.

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Endnotes

1. www.statistica.md
2. <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=311496>