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## Monica HUŢANU, Annemarie SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ<sup>1</sup>

(University of Belgrade, Serbia / Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbia) monica.hutanu@e-uvt.ro annemariesorescu@gmail.com

# Non-dominant varieties of Romanian in Serbia: between pluricentricity and division

### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the pluricentricity of Romanian, focusing on the two non-dominant varieties spoken in Serbia, Vojvodina Romanian and Vlach Romanian. We will discuss the development and current situation of the two varieties and will examine the differences between them regarding their historical and sociolinguistic context, official status in Serbia, self-identification of the speakers and identification of the outgroup, attitudes towards and linguistic distance from Romania Romanian. We will also discuss the differences in what concerns norm creation and codification: while Vojvodina Romanian is characterized by a low degree of autonomy towards the dominant variety and a general exonormative attitude, Vlach Romanian has started to codify its own proper norms and is undergoing a process of endonormative standardization.

## Romanian as a pluricentric language

In any account on pluricentricity, Romanian is usually mentioned only in relation with its variety spoken in Moldova (Kloss 1967: 31; Clyne 1992b: 457), usually as a case of "disputed pluricentricity" (Muhr 2012: 31). However, besides Moldova, varieties of Romanian can be found in other countries neighbouring Romania, namely Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia and Ukraine, as well as in countries with big Romanian immigrant communities, such as Italy and Spain, where new

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In: Rudolf Muhr / Benjamin Meisnitzer (eds.) (2018): *Pluricentric Languages and non-dominant Varieties worldwide: New Pluricentric Languages – Old Problems.* Frankfurt a.M./Wien u.a., Peter Lang Verlag.

varieties (called *rotalian* and *rumañol* respectively) seem to be emerging.

There are several reasons why the treatment of Romanian as a pluricentric language can prove problematic. First, the prevalent definition of pluricentricity presupposes the existence of several interacting centres and several standard varieties (Clyne 1992a: 1, Ammon 2005: 1536); in order to be considered pluricentric, a language "must have official recognition that exceeds the status of a minority language as it otherwise cannot function as a norm setting centre" (Muhr 2012: 30). While Romanian is the official language of Moldova (called "Moldavian" in the Constitution of 1994², but "Romanian" in a decision taken in 2013 by the Constitutional Court³), the status of the other varieties varies from regional language (in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Serbia) and several villages of the Zakkarpatia and Chernivitsi regions (Ukraine)), to minority language functioning as a regional language, but lacking the appropriate formal status (in Hungary), to minority language with no official status in Eastern Serbia and Bulgaria (where it is also called Vlach), and diaspora language in Spain and Italy.

Moreover, the situation is further complicated by the reluctance of Romanian to accept its pluricentricity. The monocentric, mononormative and highly prescriptive attitude of Romania Romanian towards its non-dominant varieties is even prescribed in a law<sup>4</sup> concerning the rights of "Romanians from everywhere", a term referring both to "the persons belonging to national minorities, linguistic minorities or autochthonous ethnic groups which inhabit the states neighbouring Romania, regardless of the ethnonym used"5 and to the Romanians who emigrated or live abroad and their descendants. While the law accepts different possible ethnonyms (and even lists 25 of them), the only term used to designate the language is *limba română* (the Romanian language). That the term refers to the dominant variety (Romania Romanian) is obvious in the recently published Strategia Națională pentru Românii de Pretutindeni pentru perioada 2017-2020 [The National Strategy for the Romanians from everywhere for the period 2017-2020<sup>6</sup>, which states that the main objective of the Ministry for Romanians from Everywhere is "promoting, advancing and expanding the usage of the Romanian language in the Romanian communities outside the border"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> http://lex.justice.md/document\_rom.php?id=44B9F30E:7AC17731

<sup>3</sup> http://lex.justice.md/md/350850/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The 299/2007 Law, regarding the support given to Romanians from everywhere (modified by the 176/2013 Law).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/87091 (our translation)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> http://www.dprp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Strategia-Nationala-2017-2020\_site.pdf

(Strategy 2017: 9, our translation). In this centralist, pan-Romanian approach, the national varieties spoken outside Romania are seen as regional varieties of Romanian, "deviant, non-standard and exotic, cute, charming, and somewhat archaic" (Clyne 1992b: 459), which need to be helped, cultivated, corrected, repaired, and regulated from the centre.

Finally, the pluricentric approach is further challenged by the move towards division through *Ausbau* (Ammon 2005: 1537-1538) that some of the non-dominant varieties, namely Moldavian Romanian and Vlach Romanian, seem to be undergoing. As Geerts (1992: 77) observed, the existence of a different name for a variety "makes the postulation of the existence of an autonomous language clearly easier than when no specific name is available", but, at the same time, "the existence of a name can again be interpreted as the expression of, at least, the will to regard one's own linguistic repertoire as an autonomous language".

However, despite all these caveats, in a wider framework also used by Hungarian linguists to talk about Hungarian as a pluricentric language (Lanstyák and Szábómihaly 1995, Huber 2016), the notion of pluricentricity can be employed as an appropriate means to describe the situation of the language used by historical speech communities outside Romania, characterized by linguistic distance from Romania Romanian due to contact with other languages and different sociohistorical contexts. A less centralistic, more pluricentric approach in treating these varieties could be a first important step towards stopping their stigmatization and preventing linguistic assimilation.

## Romanian varieties spoken in Serbia

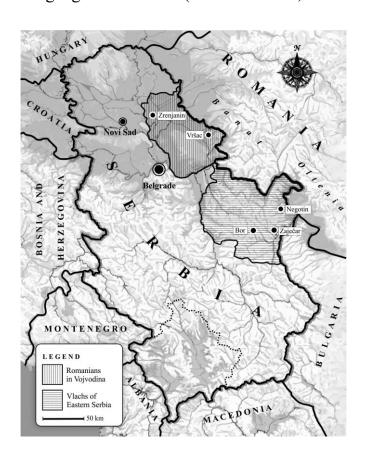
In this chapter, we will focus on the non-dominant varieties of Romanian spoken in Serbia, Vojvodina Romanian and Vlach Romanian<sup>8</sup>, extending the pluricentric language approach to these varieties, as well. The two varieties are spoken in two regions, Vojvodina and Eastern Serbia respectively, which geographically form a somewhat continuous area, both adjacent to one another as well as bordering Banat and Oltenia, two regions in present-day Romania (see

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This is also obvious in the requirement that all speakers of a non-dominant variety (except Moldavian Romanian) have to attend a Romanian language preparatory year or take a test in (standard) Romanian if they want to study in Romania.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> In the territory of Serbia, non-dominant varieties of Romanian are also spoken by the Bayash, an ethnic group considered Roma by the majority population, thought to have arrived there after slavery was abolished in Romania, in the middle of the 19th century (Sikimić 2005). The Bayash are found today across Serbia, where they live in small, nuclear communities. We will not include their varieties in our analysis as they are highly heterogenous, and also because they do not have any official recognition, as the Bayash themselves are not considered a national minority in Serbia.

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Map). Although the state borders do not cut a historical dialect continuum, Romanian migrations from the two border areas have ensured that the Romanian varieties used in Serbia have the linguistic particularities of the Romanian dialects spoken across the border, namely those of the Banat dialect in Vojvodina and those of the Banat and Oltenia dialects in Eastern Serbia (Flora 1971, Petrovici 1942). That is why the Romanian authorities, the general public and even linguists call the local varieties (dialects of) *Romanian*, abiding by the monocentric ideology that "there is only one language with a certain name [...] and there is only one language norm for it" (Muhr 2012: 27).



Map. Regions of Serbia where non-dominant varieties of Romanian are spoken.

The unusual case of having two separate non-dominant varieties spoken in one country can be accounted for by historical and socio-political reasons. Since the presence of these two communities speaking these two varieties is a result of different historical events and circumstances, there has always been a distinction in their treatment by the Serbian outgroup and authorities<sup>9</sup>, which, in turn, has had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> As Biljana Sikimić remarks (Sikimić 2014: 56-57), the difference in treatment can also be the result of the different attitudes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on the one hand, and the

repercussions on the attitudes of the two ingroups regarding their language and ethnicity. In what follows, we will discuss the development and current situation of the two varieties and their speakers, focusing on the sociolinguistic context, and in particular on the self-identification of the speakers and their identification by the outgroup, attitudes towards and distance from Romania Romanian, and the situation regarding norm-setting, codification and standardization.

## Vojvodina Romanian

The present-day Autonomous Province of Vojvodina was, until 1918, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and thus any presence of Romanians there can be explained by the regular migrations within the Empire and its administrative organization. After the First World War, the redrawing of borders devised at the Paris Peace Conference ceded this territory to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which later became Yugoslavia, and then present-day Serbia. The first census in Yugoslavia to include Vojvodina (1948) registered 63,130 Romanians, which accounted for 0.97% of the population (Census 2011: 14-15). The numbers have steadily dropped, so as that the most recent census (Census 2011) counted 29,332 Romanians in Serbia, 25,410 of which live in Vojvodina. Roughly the same number of people declared Romanian to be their mother tongue (29,075 in Serbia, out of which 24,133 in Vojvodina), which shows that around 1,000 of the respondents in Vojvodina (approx. 5%) fall in the "Xmen without Xish" paradigm (Fishman 1991). Generally speaking, members of this community identify themselves as Romanians both when speaking their language and when speaking Serbian (the language in which the questions of the census were delivered), and are also called Romanians by the outgroup.

According to the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Romanian is recognized as one of the six official languages and scripts of the province (besides Croatian, Hungarian, Ruthenian, Serbian and Slovak)<sup>10</sup> and is prescribed equal official use in the bodies of the province. The language is also used in Romanian churches in Vojvodina and in the media, and some examples include: the weekly paper *Libertatea* [Freedom], distributed throughout Vojvodina, and its monthly supplement for children; the literary magazine *Lumina* [Light]; several local papers published in different villages (see Măran 2009); and local

Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, towards ethnic groups. 

10 http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/zakoni/statut\_2014.pdf

radio and TV news programs and productions broadcast on the TV and radio channels of the Radio-Television of Vojvodina. Education in Romanian, which started already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is provided mainly at the primary, but also at the secondary level (in two high-schools in Vršac and Alibunar), using textbooks published in Serbia, including those for teaching Romanian language and literature. At the post-secondary level, the University of Novi Sad hosts a department of Romanian language and literature, whose students are mainly members of the community, while the Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" and the Teacher Faculty in Vršac provide education in Romanian for future teachers (Măran and Đuric Milovanović 2014).

In what concerns its linguistic features, the non-dominant variety of Romanian spoken in Vojvodina differentiates itself from the dominant variety mainly by lexical and phonological markers, but also by grammatical and pragmatic ones. While the lexical, grammatical and pragmatic differences are due mostly to contact with Serbian, the phonological markers are an indication of the dialectal origin of the variety, as they are still present in the nearby Banat dialect spoken in Romania. Standard Romanian, the dominant variety, is usually not spoken natively, but is acquired in school and deliberately used in the media. There is, consequently, a diglossic relation between the official standard and the actual language of use: the high variety (Romania Romanian) is learned and used in school and in other formal contexts, while the low variety (Vojvodina Romanian) is learned and used at home and in everyday communication.

It has been noticed that cultural élites in a non-dominant nation, in speaking a non-dominant variety, "tend to defer to norms from the D[ominant] nation(s)" (Clyne 1992b: 459) and "to favour the more historical standards" (Clyne 1992b: 455), as the non-dominant varieties are "often uncertain about what to do about their own norms" (Muhr 2012: 36). As expected, Vojvodina Romanian follows the same pattern: the radio and TV programs broadcast in Romanian aim to adhere to the standards of Romania Romanian, same as the journalistic and literary texts published by members of the community are written in the high variety. Even the controversial norms imposed by fairly recent (1993 and 2005) orthographic reforms of Romania Romanian have been readily and voluntarily adopted by the educated members of the community. Therefore, Vojvodina Romanian is characterized by a very low degree of autonomy towards the dominant variety, a general exonormative attitude and "linguistic schizophrenia: the proper national norm is heavily practiced but officially depreciated – the official norm is rarely practiced but officially highly appreciated" (Muhr 2012: 39).

However, despite complying with the monocentric bias of the dominant nation and language, local norms infiltrate both the oral and the written production of what Ammon (2015: 58) called "the model speakers and authors", usually professional speakers, authors, and journalists, who produce "the model texts". In keeping with the monocentric bias mentioned before, these local norms are seen by the local cultural élites<sup>11</sup> as deviations, even though at least some of them are regularly used and might be seen as "standard by mere usage" (Ammon 2015: 59). Vojvodina is therefore a very rudimentary centre (Muhr 2012: 37), with only marginal and emergent codification attempts (model speakers, textbooks). Nevertheless, a less prescriptive and conservative approach towards this non-dominant variety of Romanian spoken in Vojvodina (for example, an investigation of the "pluricentric practices" (Lüdi 2013) specific to Vojvodina Romanian or an experiment like the one conducted by Lanstyák and Szábómihaly (1996) regarding Hungarian spoken in Slovakia) could bring solid evidence regarding the development of local features (still) not codified.

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#### Vlach Romanian

Unlike Vojvodina, Eastern Serbia has been an integral part of Serbia (in its different designations) since 1830, when it was granted autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. The presence of a large Romanian-speaking community in this territory is mainly due to spontaneous migrations of Romanians over the Danube, in search of a better life, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is also possible that these successive migration waves encountered, overlapped and assimilated a previous layer of Romanized population still living at that time in the territory, but there lacks conclusive evidence. A diachronic analysis of the census data is very indicative of the status of this national group throughout the years. Thus, if in 1948 93,440 people declared to be Vlachs (which accounted for 1.43% of the population), 5 years later, in 1953, only 28,047 people declared Vlach ethnicity, but 7 times as many (198,861) people said Vlach was their mother tongue. This "native speaker of Xish without being an Xman" disparity perpetuates in the latest census (2011), which lists 35,330 people with Vlach ethnicity and 43,095 with Vlach as their mother tongue. These discrepancies suggest, on the one hand, that the self-identification of the Vlachs was politically influenced in the past, with the declaration of a different mother tongue than that of the majority

See, for example, Lia Magdu (1980)'s book on the cultivation of Romanian in Vojvodina or the attitudes of local Romanian writers regarding the authority of standard Romanian (Ćorković, forthcoming).

having been perceived as less harmful than declaring a different ethnicity, and, on the other hand, that these numbers are not entirely reliable (indeed, members of the community give much higher estimates regarding the size of their community). Today, most non-assimilated members of the community display multiple, contextual, simultaneous identities (Dimitrijević-Rufu 1994). Depending on their ideological beliefs (reintegrationist, pro-Romanian vs independentist, pro-Vlach), on the communication situation and on the language they use in that particular situation (their vernacular or Serbian), they identify themselves as Romanians or as Vlachs (and their language as Romanian or Vlach), but are always identified as Vlachs (speaking the Vlach language) by the outgroup.

In what concerns the language, it has no official status in Serbia and it used to have low prestige, both with the ingroup and with the outgroup. The feeling of inferiority and the significant self-stigmatization of this variety in comparison with Romania Romanian has been recorded already in the first descriptions and reports on the community and their language (Giuglea 1912 [2008], Vâlsan 1913 [2008]), which also document the lack of rights of the speakers and the attempts at language assimilation. For a long time, Vlach Romanian has been restricted to the family domain; only recently (2013) was it introduced in education, as an optional subject in a few schools in Eastern Serbia (8 schools in the 2016-2017 academic year) (Manovich 2014; Huṭanu and Sorescu-Marinković 2015). At the same time, three other schools (in urban settings) offer optional classes in Romania Romanian. The same dichotomy used to characterize the use of language in the media: until June 2016, the Television of Bor broadcast daily news programs both in Vlach Romanian and in Romania Romanian. However, as a result of budget and staff cuts, these programs were stopped; nowadays, the Television of Bor broadcasts only one weekly report in Vlach Romanian.

The indices of differentiation from Romania Romanian are mainly lexical, phonological and graphemic, but also grammatical and pragmatic. Just like with Vojvodina Romanian, the phonological markers are not due to contact or internal phonological development, but are a consequence of the dialectal characteristics of the original regional variety. However, unlike Vojvodina Romanian, Vlach Romanian has developed independently from Romania Romanian, with which it had, until recently, only occasional and isolated contact. There is, therefore, a bigger awareness of the differences, rather than of the similarities between the two varieties, which re-enforces the feeling of division (linguistic, political, historical, even religious, as Vlachs, like the Serbs, follow the Julian calendar). The natural divergence of this roofless variety was furthermore increased by the process of

modernization ("re-Romanization") that Romania Romanian underwent particularly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which manifested itself especially through lexical borrowing from the Romance languages (mainly French and Italian). This divergence is acknowledged by the engaged members of the community, but evaluated differently according to their ideological beliefs: those of pro-Romanian inclination consider that the introduction of standard Romanian in education would dissolve this disparity (Dragić 2007: 15-16), while those of pro-Vlach propensity perceive the imposition of standard Romanian as a mechanism of exclusion and isolation (lu Boža Kići 2010: iii-v). As a result, most members of the community do not speak the dominant variant, Romania Romanian, and, if they do, it is an ideologically charged choice and a deliberate act of learning it.

The lack of contact with Romania Romanian, as well as the emergence of a new Vlach identity that is neither Romanian nor Serbian, has triggered the development of coherent language planning measures in the direction of the codification and standardization of Vlach Romanian. Thus, several writing systems have been proposed throughout the years (Huṭanu and Sorescu-Marinković, in print), and one of them has been adopted as the official writing system (maintaining the digraphia specific to Serbian and therefore using both Cyrillic and Latin scripts). The norms of Vlach Romanian are described in a grammar of this variety, written in Serbian (Jovanović 2013), as well as in several dictionaries (lu Boža Kići 2004, 2015), including one online, still in progress (Durlić). There's a translation of the New Testament in Vlach (lu Boža Kići 2006), anthologies of Vlach fairy tales (lu Boža Kići 2011), nursery rhymes (lu Boža Kići 2010, Jović Kolerović et al. 2014) and school children literary creations (Golubović, Đorđević and Babić 2017), as well as two textbooks for teaching and learning Vlach in school (Golubović 2014, 2016). Vlach Romanian has started to codify its own proper norms (regardless of the pro-Vlach or pro-Romanian ideological stance of the authors), is undergoing a process of endonormative standardization (contested by part of the leading members of the community) and seems to be heading towards becoming a divided language through Ausbau.

However, as Tomić (1992: 437) noticed, "whether two genetically closely related idioms are designated as dialects of a monocentric language, as variants of a pluricentric language or else as distinct languages, does not depend on any inherent propensity towards autonomy or heteronomy, but rather follows from the activity of various political agents. When policies change these designations are reexamined and shifted – through systematic emphasis on differences or

similarities". While it might seem more appropriate to term the complex relationship between Vlach Romanian and Romania Romanian "post-pluricentric" (Van Rooy and Van Den Doel 2011), the reality is that the debates around Vlach Romanian and its status, both within and outside the community, are far from coming to an end (Huṭanu and Sorescu-Marinković (forthcoming)). The two factions, independentist and reintegrationist, are, for now, equally influential in the community and they both engage in language planning and codification of their variety (according to their ideology, from either a pro-Vlach or a pro-Romanian perspective). It still remains to be seen if this dispute between the two groups will lead to Vlach Romanian becoming a distinct language or not.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we proposed extending the pluricentric language approach to other non-dominant varieties of Romanian, besides Moldavian Romanian. Although such an endeavour might overstretch the concept (most varieties lack official status and the pluricentricity is not acknowledged by the dominant nation and language), we contend that this approach can be an appropriate means to describe the situation of the Romanian language used outside Romania, in historical communities located in countries neighbouring Romania and even in new large immigrant communities. Overcoming the monocentric bias could be an important step towards stopping the stigmatization of these varieties, increasing speakers' loyalty towards their own variety and preventing linguistic assimilation.

The two non-dominant varieties of Romanian that we described in this paper, Vojvodina Romanian and Vlach Romanian, can bring interesting insights into the problematic of pluricentric languages. Ever since 1918, both non-dominant varieties have been spoken in the territory of the same country (Serbia) and have developed in the same political and linguistic environment, but they have evolved differently as a result of different historical circumstances, as described in this paper. While Vojvodina Romanian is an official regional language with a general overt exonormative attitude towards Romania Romanian, but also slowly and marginally codifying its own implicit norms, Vlach Romanian seems to be becoming further divided from its dominant variety, an Ausbau language undergoing a contested process of endonormative standardization.

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