

PARTICULARITIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY POPULAR LANGUAGE. CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *The great Romanian writers consider the Romanian language as a peasant language, which has acquired "the specific charm and expressivity from its original maker, who was the peasant" (Rebreanu, in Ungheanu, 1999 :181) it is owed its development to this day, because it was the only one who has always spoken it. For this reason, the language spoken to today in the Romanian villages by the elderly people is a picturesque freshness, the words and expressions have much richer meanings, they are more flexible and full of nuances, according to the rhythm of life in constant movement and change.*

Through this paper we intend to analyze the sociological significance of popular language in general, respectively that of popular words (proverbs, sayings, idiomatic phrases) in particular from Oltenia's countryside. The approach was mainly exploratory. We used, as a main method of research, the participant observation ethically external, structured and unstructured. To identify the main words shape the lexicon of Oltenia's countryside, we made an observational study on elderly people in Dabuleni city.

The observation aimed to identify some broadcast channels of the popular words and their intergenerational transmission, the contexts in which they are used, cultural elements that they reflect (values, norms, morals, stereotypes), this study bringing many innovative elements in this area.

Key words: popular language; Romanian village; rural culture; proverbs.

1. Theoretical considerations

1.1. Introduction: Language as a depository of culture

Specialist literature devotes many concepts and, at the same time, many definitions of the term „language”. Some of them identify language with dialect (Mihăilescu, 2003:384), for others language replaces language (Schaefer,

2008:65), while the third category of approaches tends to reverse this report. Language is that ensemble of significant units that hoard and perpetuate all the other defining elements of a culture (values, norms, traditions, rites etc.), uniting the participants to a culture in a community (Cioacă, 2018). By transmitting language in primary socialization, the transmission of culture takes place (Otovescu, 2009:231). From this point of view, language is, in a durkheimist sense, a social fact: it is imposed on individuals, having the character of over-individuality and exteriority, constituting itself as a genuine binder between the individual and the society. Looking from the perspective of structural-functional theories, language is the one that confers identity and historical continuity to a community. In addition to cultural productions such as poetry, songs, ballads and myths, a special interest in this study is the proverbs that „are important milestones of social representations about everyday life, how we relate to our fellow men, and how which justify our behaviors” (Salánki, 2002:2).

1.2. Characteristics of the contemporary popular language

“Our troubled ancestors suffered, fought, and died. And old songs and poems rose from their hearts like flowers on tombs.” says Mihail Sadoveanu in his reception speech in the Romanian Academy, entitled "Folk Poetry" (Sadoveanu in Ungheanu, 1999:153) in which he also makes his confession of faith, that "the Romanian people are his literary father" (Ibidem).

The relationship between language and culture has been surprised by Simion Mehedinți since the 30's of the last century, which notes: "Language and culture are conjoined facts. As the tool is the index of civilization, ie the adaptation to the material environment, so the vocabulary is the most obvious exponent of culture, ie adaptation to the social-ethical environment. The dictionary of a people measures the most obvious degree of condensation of the soul experience (thinking and feeling), which a generation passes over to the next generations." (Mehedinți, 1930:56). Speaking of millions of people, the Romanian language, as any living language, is in continuous development, which is why many words come out of use, others come into use both in written and in spoken language, the number of words can not be established exactly. For Romanian, there are a number of lexicons and dictionaries that approximate the total number of vocabulary words: in the dictionary published by Lazăr Șăineanu more than a century ago, the total number of words was slightly above 50,000, in the DEX edition of 1993, this number reached 65,000 words, and in the DEX published in 2016, the number of words in Romanian reached 67,000. According to the researchers, the new dictionaries of the Romanian language have the highest percentage of "et.nec." (unknown etymology) of all the dictionaries of languages that can be consulted (Georgescu in Chelcea, coord, 1998:102) and missing a bibliography of Romanian etymologies, a necessary instrument for the philosophy of science.

Romanian has always been the language of all Romanians, and we can not talk about dialects that are not understood by any of the Romanians, no matter what region they are part of. According to Oltenia Metropolitan Bishop Irineu, in an interview with Agerpres, about the unity of the Romanian language, Saint Simion Stephen, in the New Testament preface in Belgrade, claims that it is not the fault of the Romanians that they were scattered in different provinces, but the Romanian language a good coin circulated everywhere, and today there is no Romanian, no matter in which area of the country he would live, who does not understand the language of the Romanians in the other areas, as happens, for example, in other countries (ÎPS Irineu, Mitropolitul Oltenie, Interview Agerpres, 2018). And this is due to the contribution of the peasantry that had a primordial role in the life of the nation, and which cultivated the language only in connection with the earth, its source of life, and the concrete world in which it existed. "In the lives of other nations, the peasantry could have, and had, a secondary, erased role; but for us it is the source of pure and eternal Romanianism.

At us, the only permanent, unalterable reality was and remained the peasant. So much so that, in fact, the Romanian peasant is not even a peasant like other peoples. The word itself is of urban origin, at least in the present meaning. The peasant never calls himself a peasant. It was only in the newer times and under political influence that the word came to the country to indicate the man from the village in contrast to the one from the town.

In the 1970s, UNESCO created an international dictionary of literary terms, containing words belonging to the different languages of the world. From the Romanian language, only three words of netradus, namely "dor (miss)", "doina" and "colinda (carolina)" were accepted, and the fact that only three Romanian words were selected intrigued the philosopher Constantin Noica who also campaigned this sense, but unfortunately unsuccessful. "An international dictionary of literary terms, made up of words belonging to the different languages of the world is being prepared for UNESCO. Three Romanian words were accepted: "miss", "doina", "carolina". If the dictionary would have only 3,000 words, we would be present with 1 / 1000th of them, while the number of languages present in the dictionary can only be a few dozen. Let's overcome the fact that we are participating in quite a few words than would have fallen democratically. Culture languages do not know about democracy. Here the force (fortunately the expressive force, the artistic force, the power of spreading) is the force that is imposed, along with the historical prestige, of course (...). We are saddened by the fact that these are three. It would be, for all of us, especially interesting that we know what other words have been proposed. However, the UNESCO Committee (...) detained only these three tremors, leaving us in our eyes, perhaps in ours, where the world has found us a century and a half ago, when we went out and we in the light of history again: in folk culture" (Noica,

1987:246-267). No institution responded to Noica. The Romanian philosopher did not regret the fact that only three words were chosen, but the fact that they were the three, which reduced the Romanian culture to a single dimension - the folk culture, without making any reference to the philosophical dimension. Noica proposes a few words that he thinks would define Romanian culture in its much deeper structure: "lămurire (clarification)", "sine (self)", "întru (in)", "rost (groom)", "petrecere (party)" and says "we could present at any contest the beauty of the thought with this pride of our speech" (Ibidem).

Many of the expressions used by the members of the studied group are specific only to the area in which they live (Dăbuleni, Dolj, Romania), have been formed through social reporting to the daily life of that community, to common experiences and to its people, and have been transmitted from generation to generation in generation (Ca Veta lu' Purcică"; "Parcă e Pupăza lu' Nae!"; "Vă ia Samodiva!"). These phrases are testimonies of identity, historical continuity, self-awareness, and training based on shared experiences and creativity within the community. Veta lu' Purcica and Pupaza lu' Nae once lived, behaved in a way that remained as a prototype in the community where people can report whenever they identify a similar situation. A well-known Romanian doctor told in a TV show that he grew up in the countryside, "among the babies' skirts, for that he liked to listen to their stories, which made him in his medical activity to go after the problems of life. In all my activity, it was a great benefit to me to learn from the elders in the Romanian villages that gathered and talked about the undead, moroi, about all sorts of situations, they had all sorts of stories (many scary) which I liked to listen to and which later made me ask all sorts of questions in connection with life (Rachitan, 2018). The language of these people, whose average age is not a cultivated language, but it is a flexible, living language, because it has been in direct contact with the life of the community. "Languages that are too cultivated, mature, become rigid, abstractive, mechanical. Losing or despising direct contact with the people eventually ages, artificializes, they become dead bodies - Latin, Greek, Hebrew. (...) This language, like all peasant works, is conservative and defensively defends its conformation, remaining refractory to violent attempts. The neologisms, apart from the specialized ones with circulation only in certain spheres, generalize uneasily and only after they suffer the notional and formal transformations that are appropriate to its spirit" (Rebreanu, in Ungheanu, 1999:180).

In the Dolj county, at the 2011 census, 7 (seven) of the 376 villages had no inhabitants, and one of the seven villages belonged to the Dăbuleni territorial-administrative unit (Chiașu village). Also, in 46 other villages (over 12% of the county's villages), the number of inhabitants was below 100 (in 30 villages lived below 25 persons) (data provided by Dolj Regional Statistics Directorate). As one of the biggest problems in Dolj village is aging (most of the average age is around 60 years) and the departure of young people to work abroad, we ask what

changes will be recorded in the next 5-10-20 and at the language level in the area, what words? Surely, with today's people in villages whose homes will remain deserted, many of the words, expressions, proverbs used today will disappear, but those who go abroad to work with new words from the countries where did they work for decades?

Rebreanu claims that the Romanian language was kept in the present form by the peasants, and "the efforts of the former philologists who wanted to" relatinize "were condemned to fail as well as other more modern reformers who tried to "Rumance" through the resurrection of Slavonicism eliminated by its natural evolution" (Rebreanu, op.cit.). The same fate had its attempts to "urbanize" it by borrowing from foreign languages not only words, but also grammatical and syntactic constructions, "probably considering (...) that the Romanian people are "bad and not good. The peasant stubbornly spoke only Romanian and refused to learn a foreign language even when the circumstances or needs would have forced him. In Transylvania, in mixed regions, Hungarians and Saxons were always those who spoke Romanian, not Hungarians or Romanians. I did not know any Romanian peasant who knew Hungarian or any other foreign language, in the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy there were regiments of Romanians who stayed with foreign countries through foreign provinces. The soldiers spoke Romanian wherever they were, in Vienna as well as in Bosnia, and when someone addressed them in a foreign language, they invariably answered "I do not know.", because some bodies were even called "do not know regiment". It does not mean that the Romanian peasant is incapable of learning a foreign language, but only keeps above all his ancestral preface. How much talent and especially how much Romanians have a predilection for foreign languages proves our townspeople and overseers of all categories, who today, as always, think thinner and more cultivated if they speak, most of the time, badly, any other language, only strange to be." (Ibidem).

2. Case study

2.1. Methods

We conducted a research on the third-age people in Dăbuleni, the research being facilitated by the contemporary version of the corvee ("clacă"). A first aspect that could be attributed to this approach is the investigation of an urban community (Dăbuleniul is an official city) and the extrapolation of conclusions for the rural environment. However, beyond the formally distinguished differences, we consider that the sociological perspective must relate especially to the concrete social realities, less to the administrative ones. Thus, despite its "urbanized" community status in official documents, in the context of the wave of overnight transformation of rural communities into urban communities to meet the criteria for integration into the European Union, the

community of dwellers is, from the point of view of the nature of the relations social, norms of interaction and institutional model, neither more nor less than the ideal - the type of the Oltenian village. Collective consciousness acts uniformly on the inhabitants, and the set of morals is considered sacred to social interaction, with many cases of relatives excluded from the community, precisely because of the disregard of traditionally established normality. Institutions of public morality (Church and School) continue to enjoy a high degree of trust, and traditions are not optional but imperative. The discrepancy between social and legal-administrative reality should, in our opinion, be a constant concern of researchers. But this is another research topic that is not the subject of this study.

To achieve the research goal, we used a **case study based on a mixed methodology**. Thus, we used the **external deontological participatory observation** (the participants were informed about our observer status, correlated with our involvement in the discussion), alternating with the **neutral participatory observation** (low involvement in the discussion). We have indicated to the participants to use as many proverbs, sayings, popular talks as possible during the talks whenever the context allows. Otherwise, the observation should have lasted for tens of hours, given the rather low frequency of using these expressions in everyday language, even in rural areas. The phrases were written in a table, the observation being **structured** in this respect. The matrix underlying the observation sheets has been completed and will be presented and interpreted in the following. In addition to the observation, we used, in a non-systematic way, the **exploratory discussion**.

The observation took place on three distinct days, April 15, 2018, April 18, 2018, and May 6, 2018, for a period of about three to four hours each day. The meeting of local people is done "on the way" at the gate of one of the neighbors, the participants being always the same (10-12 persons). Another significant detail is the fairly balanced ratio of women and men (usually spouse couples), with the exception of the last day in which women had the highest share.

2.2. Results: expressions, proverbs and sayings

EXPRESSION	CONTEXT MEANING	AND	GENRE ¹	USE ²
1	<i>Toma necredinciosu'</i> (Toma the unfaithful)	Used by a gentleman in dialogue with a friend who did not think the postman came in the morning.	1	1
2	<i>Vă ia Samodiva!</i>	A lady draws attention to children aged 5-6 years not to eat mirabelle because they are not ripe.	2	1
3	<i>Te ia Zamodiva!</i>	Also used to attract a child's attention.	2	1
4	<i>Dă-i călcâie!</i>	A lady is encouraged to tell about her elder girl who married in Germany.	2	1
5	<i>Ca Veta lu' Purcică</i>	Referring to a woman with possible mental deficiencies, dressed very colorful and not at all assorted.	2	1
6	<i>Parcă e Pupăza lu' Nae!</i>	Referring to a woman considered light-hearted, because she divorced and remarried. This is how both social types are illustrated by allegorical characters and the community attitude regarding the second marriage.	2	1
7	<i>Fă-te frate cu dracu' până treci puntea.</i> (Make yourself brother	In a discussion of a land dispute, a person advises another to	2	1

¹ 1 – the expression was used by a male person, 2 - the expression was used by a female person.

² How many times the phrase was used during the discussion.

	with the devil until you cross the deck.)	continue working with a lawyer, although he is moving very hard.		
8	<i>Nu-i face altuia ce ție nu îți place.</i> (Do not do to others what you do not like.)	Variation of the proverb <i>What you do not like, another does not do it.</i> Also in the discussion of the earth, a person recommends that another person should not take revenge on a neighbor.	2	1
9	<i>Rău faci, rău primești, bine faci, bine găsești.</i> (You do wrong, you get bad, you do well, you can find good.)	We note the attachment of two distinct proverbs, thus reaching a complete meaning, similar to the one in the proverb <i>After deed, and reward.</i> It is used in the same context as the previous proverb.	2	1
10	<i>Cine uită pământul, uita-l-ar și el.</i> (Whoever forgets the earth, forget it be.)	The curse-shaped curse, used with reference to a lady's son who had left the village for eight years without giving any sign. Interesting is the implicit synonym of earth / homeland / home.	2	1
11	<i>Lua-te-ar Domnului!</i> <i>Maica</i>	With reference to a child who, through his noise, disturbs the natural course of discussion. The expression was consecrated in the theological circles by Father Ilie Cleopa. Can we ask if Father Cleopa has picked it from folklore, or is it a creation that has spread	2	1

		to the south of the country? Or is it just a coincidence?		
12	Mai bine-ar vedea bârna din ochii ei. (She'd better see the beam in her eyes.)	Proverb of biblical inspiration, used to highlight the whims of a gossiping neighbor, absent from the discussion.	2	1
13	Semeni vânt, culegi furtună. (Plant wind, you're picking a storm.)	Proverb of biblical inspiration, referring to a person who refused to marry, reaching old age alone and pawned by a paw.	2	1
14	A căzut din lac în puț. (He fell from the lake into the well.)	About the "trouble" of a small entrepreneur selling smuggling cigarettes. After hiding them in the attic, in an attempt to escape the law, they were found by the wife who had no knowledge of his husband's unclear affairs.	1	1
15	Nu ți-ai înghițit gălbinarea?	With reference to a woman, extremely withdrawn, asleep and apathetic during the talks.	2	1
16	Gura omului o astupă doar pământul.	About gossip. Paradoxically, moralistic reflection comes after two hours of gossip.	2	1
17	Ce tot te olicăiești, dadă?	A reply to a woman complaining of headaches.	2	1

18	<i>Ești galbină ca lămâia.</i> (You are yellow like lemon.)	With respect to that woman, extremely pale. And, as the coincidences are quite rare in socio-cultural life, we find this comparison in folk songs: "And the wine is made of beard, yellow as lemon" (Maria Lătărețu, De ce nu te-nsori Gheorghita, 60s, Electrecord). Given that lemon is, however, an exotic fruit, it is possible that this comparison has been publicized through popular songs, being taken over and sent by a metaphorical deviation to the idea of pale, sick. Operating with another hypothesis, the term could come from lemon, a popular flower in the area, but which is white, not yellow, or from a grape variety of the same name.	2	1
19	<i>I-atârnă ochii după ea.</i>	About a young man in love.	2	1
20	<i>Mă uit ca curca-n crăci.</i>	A lady's reply, very attentive to my laptop. Perhaps a local variation of expression You look like <i>a hen in the wood</i> .	2	1
21	<i>Domnul îți dă lumânarea, dar nu ți-o și aprinde.</i> (God gives you the candle, but he doesn't light it.)	Perhaps another variant of the proverb <i>God gives you, but he does not put it in the bag</i> . It is used to describe the situation of a very rich woman from the perspective of	2	1

		cultivated plants and animals raised by the work of her husband, but too lazy to cook these foods.		
22	<i>Ce ți-e scris în frunte-i pus.</i>	Referring to the success of a villager, a university professor, whose parents live nearby. Social prestige and social success in general are at the expense of predestination.	2	1
23	<i>Tot cu secera și ciocanul, că altfel...</i>	Expression used to emphasize the importance of work. Very likely, a communist-era remanence.	2	1
24	<i>De când era țiganul alb.</i>	Asking an old lady about her shirt, because she had a lot of specific characteristics of the Oltenian one, she responded to me since she was the white gypsy, to express her age. The likely meaning of expression is: from ancient times.	2	1
25	<i>Nici răchita nu-i ca pomul, nici țiganul nu-i ca omul.</i>	Referring to a Roma person with a low, uneducated and excluded education level in the community. So, through proverbs, social stereotypes are also transmitted.	2	1

Tab.1. Results: expressions, proverbs and sayings

2.3. Observations and conclusions

➤ **Women - the depositories of tradition**

The gender distribution is obvious. Only two men used a popular word, and those well-known.

➤ **Using names to illustrate certain social types**

We note the use of some nouns to designate certain social prototypes (Toma Necredinciosu, Veta lu 'Purcica, Pupaza lu' Nae). Ask if these people actually existed, the answer was: we do not know, as it were, from elders! Thus, Toma Necredinciosu was, according to a native, a 93-year-old, rather unbelieving, who had died five years ago.

In this context, there are two working hypotheses that could guide further research:

- Persons designated by their own names have existed, remaining in collective memory for the features they have embodied;
- These are, in fact, fictitious characters, constructions of the collective imaginary, designed to validate values, morals and social norms in general.

➤ **Incantations are a source of popular expressions**

When we noticed the different phonetic use of the term "samodiva" or "zamodiva", I asked what is the correct form. From that moment on, the women gathered in counsel were divided into two camps - some (five) claimed that the self-righteousness was the right one, while others (two) claimed that correct pronunciation was defamatory. At one point, one of the women brings an argument that will turn out to be decisive: "that's what the gossip says." It should be stressed that Oltenia's rural south is heavily impregnated with incantations, widely used for the treatment of various mental and physical affections. The pedagogical principle of gossip is as follows: the gossip is transmitted from the mother to the daughter, and the daughter must keep it from flight, not to teach it in a systematic manner. This explains the differential learning of the pronunciation of the self-titled term. Interestingly, some structures in the spell are "cut" and used as such in everyday speech.

➤ **Popular folk music, but also political ideologies can generate and diffuse expressions, which later intergenerationally losing their origins.**

This is the example of the popular song quoted in the table (but one example identified can not validate this hypothesis), but also of the phrase *Tot cu secera și ciocanul, că altfel...*

➤ **Biblical quotations or adaptations of them have an important frequency, although their origin is unknown.**

➤ **Through proverbs, social stereotypes are also transmitted.**

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