

## Abstract

Vilmos Tánzos: *Language Shift among the Moldavian Csángós*. Habilitation Thesis. 2013.

The Moldavian Csángós are an ethnical and religious minority of Hungarian origin living in the Eastern territory of Romanian, Moldavia. Today the Moldavian Csángós differ from the Romanian Orthodox majority mainly through their Roman Catholic religion, as the language of their ancestors is spoken only by a small group, especially by older generations, and the great majority of the ethnic group declared itself to be of Romanian nationality and have Romanian as a mother tongue. The language shift of the Csángó minority is going to be complete in the foreseeable future, and due to the powerful effects of modernization its traditional ethnic culture is going to disappear in a short time.

Under the given circumstances, the official census data (1992, 2002, 2011) undoubtedly do tell something about the language situation and ethnic identity of the Moldavian Csángós, but this data must be interpreted considering the fact that official surveys, due to various reasons, are not able to display the actual and complicated language situation of the Moldavian Csángó group, and neither can they reflect their absolutely specific collective identity. While the official statistics tell us little about the language assimilation processes and the development of ethnic identity, since 1989, the very phenomena have become a prominent object of scientific research.

Concerning the language command among the Csángós, I first conducted a comprehensive basic research regarding every Csángó settlement in parallel, i.e. as an „appendix,” to my ethnographic work. The supplement actually meant an estimation based upon village fieldwork which concerned the command of the actual Hungarian language. The aim of the research was to investigate the levels of linguistic competence among speakers of the Csángó dialects nowadays and provide data regarding the linguistic competence and the number of the speakers within generations and geographical locations, describing the causes and processes of the language shift that is currently taking place.

The results of my researches have been published in different studies in several languages (Hungarian, Romanian, English and German, see the annexed bibliography), as well as in my recent volumes *Madárnyelven* (2011) and *Language Shift among the Moldavian Csángós* (2012).

This latter volume is at the same time my habilitation thesis that I submit for the evaluation process.

Every study in the volume was written about the gradually perishing language of the Moldavian Csángós, and it also touches upon the issues of the ethnic identity of the group. The first study of the volume presents the reasons for linguistic assimilation as well as the demographical data of assimilation processes in a longer period of time. The second study presents the language competence of the Moldavian Csángó villages where Hungarian is still spoken, determining the level of competence in each generation. The map annexes and graphs created based on the numerical data demonstrate the present-day situation of language change within the community. The third study of the volume summarizes the main issues, methodological problems and results of the research referring to the language of the Moldavian Csángós. The fourth study presents the language ideologies that have been created within intellectual circles referring to the language and language use of the Moldavian Csángós since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second part of the volume includes essays referring to the language and identity knowledge of the Moldavian Csángós, the description of field work experiences as well as reports that favour several interpretations.

Some conclusions:

1. As revealed by the published data, those living in the diaspora communities no longer have the mass base, which is a fundamental condition for the continued living of a language. The traditional Hungarian language “atmosphere,” in most places, is “not dense enough” in order to preserve the language.

2. The results of the linguistic study carried out show that the use of the term, ‘language shift,’ in a collective sense is appropriate, because, as the result of changes in the language among the Moldavian Csángós, Hungarian monolingualism is replaced by the Romanian monolingualism.

3. The data regarding the command of the Hungarian language clearly shows that the deterioration of the language is very strong in every settlement. Although there are major differences in the progress of the language shift in some villages, the language command of the younger generations is, without exception, in every settlement, dramatically worse than that of the older generation.

4. A given generation in a certain village community behaves in a different way in different language situations, that is, its linguistic manifestations can be characterized by different levels, depending on the circumstances.

5. The language shift of the Moldavian Csángós is to be seen within the community as a unit, and this process should be placed in a broader perspective of time. The data of my survey can be perceived as indicating the present-day status, by settlements, of a linguistic assimilation process that began long ago.

Looking at the evolution of language processes, the question naturally arises, whether the processes of linguistic assimilation will eventually lead inevitably to language shift. The final conclusion of the research is that the living language must be regarded as a unitary ecosystem and we must be aware that the choice of linguistic code in a given communication situation is influenced by many factors, differing in strength and prestige, so that their impact on the language is also variable. The determinants of language shift are complex, and consequently, slowing, halting, or even reversing the language shift, through language revitalization, can only be successful if those factors are changed as a whole.

The researches regarding the actual language command and language use are of central importance because these issues have also legal connotations. It is obvious that language competence and language self-consciousness together mean a possibility of legal validation for a certain ethnic group, or even an ability to reach it. The *Recommendation* No. 1521, approved in 2001, the Council of Europe obliges Romania to protect the traditional culture and language of the Moldavian Csángós, but this is possible only if the Csángós themselves stick to these values as well, or if they dispose of these traditional cultural values, including also their language.

Conf. dr. Vilmos Tánzos

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