

LANGUAGE, FREEDOM AND UNITY:  
ASPECTS OF  
THE ROMANIAN GREAT UNION

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*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*  
Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

*Limba națională este entitate sacră pentru un popor,*  
*pentru că este cel dintâi semn al identității sale.*<sup>2</sup>  
Eugen Simion

*Words are a form of action.*  
John Langshaw Austin<sup>3</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Language* represents a system of communication by means of which we define concepts and values, we share ideas and express feelings, we transmit information and influence the activities and behavior of others. Therefore, one can argue that language and reality are closely related entities. Reality can be expressed by the linguistic vehicle of natural languages as the state of things as they actually exist. This paper revisits one of the postulates of the philosophy of language that sees natural languages as representing attempts at *unifying* the diversity and the individuality. The framework of the discussion is given by the historic moment of the Romanian Great Union in December 1918 when the Romanian language represented one

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1 Considered by some to be the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, Ludwig Wittgenstein played a central, if controversial, role in 20th-century analytic philosophy. He continues to influence current philosophical thought in topics as diverse as logic and language, perception and intention, ethics and religion, aesthetics and culture (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/>);

2 *The national language is a sacred entity for one people as it is the first landmark of its identity:* Eugen Simion in *The Unity of Romanian Language*. In the vol.: "The Romanian Language and Its Local Varieties", Bucharest, The Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, 1955, p. 7;

3 Austin, J.L., 1962, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, p. 21.

of the most important, if not the most important, factors that led to the accomplishment of the union of all Romanian provinces of the time.

**Keyword:** ethnicity, identity, language, language universals, liberty, unity

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In the midst of the temptations of globalization, the present time seems more and more concerned with the imperative of preserving ethnic and cultural identity. But this ultimate desideratum does not represent an acquisition of our times. It was a steadily-preserved, unchanging factor, that fueled the unanimous efforts of peoples throughout their history of which the Romanian Great Union of 1918 is but a relevant example.

Traditionally, the philosophy of language<sup>4</sup> sees natural languages as representing attempts at unifying the diversity and the individuality. It is considered that humans in the “civilized world” share a common thought structure: language creates thought and thought creates language. The main use of language is to transfer thoughts from one mind, to another mind. Starting from Plato and later Descartes, one has been taking into serious account the power of language to create or influence reality. This idea was further discussed by Noam Chomsky, the famous American linguist of the second part of the twentieth century, who coined “universal grammar”. Chomsky argued that all languages have a common structural basis: the set of rules known as “universal grammar”.

Chomsky postulated the existence of some universal properties of natural human languages<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, it can be said that language, stemming from language universals - arising from universality - can lead to universality<sup>6</sup>.

There have been studies<sup>7</sup> undertaken which conclude that the relationship between language, culture and communication (oral or written) shapes the world in which we live, and even the manner in

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4 Philosophy of language explores the relationship between language and reality;

5 It was Chomsky’s postulate that all humans are born with a common innate set of abilities to acquire grammar/language;

6 Chomsky, Noam, *Cartesian Linguistics*, New York: Harper and Row, 1965, (Reprint: — (1986), *Cartesian Linguistics. A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, p. 63.

7 <http://communication.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-166?print=pdf> (accessed on June 11, 2018);

which we communicate. Unfortunately, it is difficult to define each of these vital elements, and there is no unanimously accepted definition of culture or communication. This renders the relationship between them highly complex as well as necessary in the process of explaining certain events or realities. The well-known Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one member of a group from another”<sup>8</sup>. In his several-decade-long research, Hofstede emphasizes the ability of individuals to reshape their “mental programs” acquired over time, to accept new ways of thinking, finally identifying themselves with the group in which they are about to integrate. And language proves a highly useful tool in acquiring this reshaping process.

The conviction about the vital meaning of language for the ethnic and cultural identity of a nation, for the existence of a nation, for political unity constitutes a fundamental truth that has powerfully pervaded the social-political Romanian mindset. In what follows we will tackle the main testimonies of what the Romanian mindset was on the topic of national unity. We will explore the beliefs on the national, political and cultural meaning of language for the life of the Romanian people, as they were expressed over time.

This investigation is worth doing as it is able to reveal their realistic and evolved character, to legitimize political creed of the ones that accomplished the Romanian Great Union, to plenary demonstrate the primacy of the Great Union imperative and substantiate its permanence and triumph. This vital quest for national unity and identity has been acknowledge as such and highly proclaimed by all the outstanding representatives of Romanian culture, from its beginning until today:

“Invested with supreme significance, the national language represented the object of convergent, continuous preoccupations of successive generations of scholars from all of Romania”<sup>9</sup>.

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8 Hofstede, Geert, 2003, *Culture's Consequences*, Sage Publications Thousand Oaks, California, USA, p. 6;

9 Grecu, Victor V., 2002, *Unity of Romanian Language – Factor of Political Unification*, In vol.: “A Linguist for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. Materials of the International Conference “Philology of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, (Bălți, May, 18-19, 2001), Chişinău, The Ştiinţifică Publishing House, 2002, pp. 81-87.

The consciousness of national unity, unity and uniqueness of the language, produced by the evolution of self-consciousness as a people and then as a nation is first referred to by the exponents of religious literature. As early as 1643, the archbishop Varlaam uses a special for his religious educative work *Cazania*: he entitles it *Romanian Book of Learning*. Therefore, he does not use the word “Wallachian”, or “Moldovan” or “Transylvanian”, but the term “Romanian”, proving that he was very aware that he was addressing all Romanian inhabitants of provinces. His book was thus destined to all Romanians.

Five years later, the same view is expressed by another church bishop, Simion Stephen, in his New Testament of Balgrad, in 1648, and “The Bible” in Bucharest, 1688. Following the same path of thinking, for the chroniclers of the time, the unity of the language was assured by its latinity, as Romanian is a Romance language, sprung from Latin. Another example worth citing is the notorious steward to the king, Constantin Cantacuzino, who said: “the Romanians have sprung from one spring and they are still flowing”<sup>10</sup>. Dimitrie Cantemir, the prince of scholars, also made ample references to the Romance character as well as to the ethnic and linguistic unity and continuity of Romanians everywhere.

Therefore, language unity is considered to be the most powerful and, at the same time, accessible, clear and convincing proof and evidence of the national identity of all Romanians. This is all the more so that “one cannot invoke a more convincing argument for the ethnic unity of the Romanians both in the north and the south of the Danube, apart from language and name”<sup>11</sup>.

As we have seen in the examples above, for centuries, the struggle for language has meant, for all the scholars of the nation, the struggle for the defense of national identity, a vital component of the political struggle for emancipation, sovereignty and political unity<sup>12</sup>.

It is important to mention the fact that the historic process in which all the provinces inhabited by Romanians merged into the same national state, Romania, was also favoured by three main factors. These were

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10 Idem;

11 Budai-Deleanu, Ion, 1970, *Linguistic Works*, Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 39.

12 Grecu, Victor V., 1973, *Language and Nation*, Facla Publishing House, Timisoara, p. 67;

the European ideological, political and military context, the widespread presence of the national sentiment among the Romanian population and the political action of the elites in the Wallachia and Moldova provinces and the former Austro-Hungarian empire.

This indestructible relationship between language and nation<sup>13</sup>, between language unity and national unity was a highly important aspect of all Romanian scholars' consciousness. The essential role of language in the formation and definition of the nation's identity is fully asserted by Alexandru Papiu Ilarian, in his *History of Romanians from Dacia Superior. Sketches vol. III*: "Even blood ties cannot make a nation as its language can"<sup>14</sup>. Intuitively, he believes that "language and nationality, without which there is no life, are the conditions of the Romanians' political and national existence"<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, in the mindset of many generations of scholars, *language* and *life* are synonymous: George Bariț, sharing Papiu Ilarian's conviction equally proclaims: "Language is the condition of political life or death"<sup>16</sup>.

The creation of the Romanian Literary Society in 1866 was destined to share the same purpose as it was declared upon its dedication. The Romanian scholar Timotei Cipariu, one of the founding members of the Romanian Literary Society declared in the inaugural speech: The Academy will take care of the preservation of unity of our literary language"<sup>17</sup>. It was the same desideratum that Alexandru Roman was to proclaim, prophetically, in the closing of his speech, given on July 31/12 August, on behalf of the Transylvanian delegation that took part to the founding of this national academic forum, a symbol of the unity of all Romanians: "Let it be that, from the unity of our literary language, by means of the precious path of science, our national unity shall result!"<sup>18</sup>

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13 Ibidem, p. 85;

14 Papiu Ilarian, Alexandru, 1943, *The History of Romanians from Dacia Superior. Sketches vol. III*, Published with introductory notes by dr. Ștefan Pascu, Sibiu, p. 3;

15 Ibidem, p. 11;

16 Bariț, George, 1845, *The Romanian Language*. In: "Paper for Mind, Heart and Literature", VIII (1845), nr. 2, p. 13;

17 Urechia, V.A., 1867, *The official and unofficial acts of the Inauguration of the Romanian Literary Society*, Bucharest, , p. 48;

18 *The Annals of the Romanian Academy*, Second Series, volume XXXIV, p. 226;

In this context, the fight for the cultivation and unification of the Romanian language, as the ultimate piece of evidence for national identity and the theme of political unity, acquires a new and extremely valuable meaning. Nowadays, it must be taken into very careful consideration more than ever before because of the contemporary historical-political context where national identity may clash with the aspirations of globalization and the aspects of European integration.

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