

Bălgarskijat ezik v Moldova ‘The Bulgarian Language in Moldova’
and Hidden Linguistic Treasure on the Plains of Bessarabia⁰

2002. Komrat, Moldova: Znak ‘94, 71 pp.

Review by *Donald L. Dyer*
The University of Mississippi

The Bulgarians of Moldova are a relatively small group, but they remain quite productive, carrying on a rich scholarly tradition. Their most recent publication, this a collective one, is entitled *Bălgarskijat ezik v Moldova* ‘The Bulgarian Language in Moldova’ (hereafter, “BEM”) and results from an academic conference held in Comrat, Moldova on May 18, 2001, which addressed the theme “The Functioning of Bulgarian and Other Languages and Literatures in the Context of the Language Situation in Moldova.” The volume is edited by Kiril Cankov, and although short in length at only seventy-one pages, contains eleven articles that cover topics such as literature, education, culture and history, as well as the Bulgarian, Romanian and Gagauz languages. BEM belongs to a cluster of books on the Bulgarians and Bulgarian language of Moldova published in the past decade by the abovementioned specialists, including Novakov *et al.* (1993, 1995), Grek and Červenkov (1993), Dončev *et al.* (1995), Mitev and Červenkov (1996), Červenkov *et al.* (1996), Grek (1999) and Čelak (1999). I reviewed the first offering in this group quite positively in an article several years ago (Dyer 2001).

According to the volume’s “Introduction” (pp. 1-2), participants at the conference included professors from Comrat State University and the State Pedagogical Institute “Ion Creangă” in Chişinău, scholars from the Moldovan Academy of Sciences and teachers from the southern Moldovan town of Taraclia. The overwhelming majority of the papers selected for publication (ten) are written in Bulgarian; the eleventh is in Romanian. By discipline, eight articles deal with language or language and education (six on Bulgarian, one on Romanian and one on Gagauz), two involve culture and one literature.

BEM begins with “Bulgarian Educational Developments in the City of Comrat during the 1860s” (7-12), a small article by Nikolaj Červenkov, noted Moldovan linguist and historian of Bulgarians in Bessarabia. Červenkov, in a proper tribute to the hosts of the conference, discusses educational and cultural contributions to the city of Comrat by one of its famous residents and city

officials, ethnic Bulgarian Ivan Ivanov. In the 1850s and 1860s, Ivanov succeeded in significantly advancing the education and cultural life of Bulgarians in the area, advocating for and implementing curricular reform in the Bulgarian schools. Ivanov authored educational materials and sent Bulgarian educators into the schools of the region to teach.

Another clientele to speak to in this volume are the locally strong ethnic Gagauz people, Christian Turks who have been living in Moldova since the end of the 18th century, and Evdokija Soročanu does just that with her article "Bulgarian Borrowings in Gagauz" (13-18). In her own words, "... [the Gagauz language] represents an interesting form of a Turkic language with substantive indications of influence from the Slavic languages and Romanian, primarily in the lexica" (13).

Soročanu begins her interesting and timely article as she surveys earlier (albeit few) works on Gagauz by, among others, Dmitriev, Syčeva and Kolca,¹ culminating in 1973 with the ground-breaking dictionary by Gavril Gajdarži. She examines the various relationships — semantic, formal phonetic and word formation — existing between contemporary Gagauz words and original Bulgarian lexica from which they were borrowed (14-15). The article ends with a sampling of 107 such words from eleven lexical categories, mostly agricultural and religious.

Editor Kiril Cankov's own contribution to the volume, "Bulgarians beyond the Borders of Bulgaria" (19-24), is one of BEM's better pieces. Cankov makes the claim that Moldovan Bulgarian and the Banatian Bulgarian of Romania, Hungary and Serbia are unique linguistic diasporic varieties of the language, since they exist entirely in environments of multilingualism (19). In addition to discussing Banatian and Moldovan Bulgarian in his article, Cankov also addresses the alphabet reform of Ukrainian Bulgarian (21-22) and the Bulgarian of Macedonia (22).

Liuba Petrenco's article, "The Category of Nominal Determination in Romanian and Bulgarian" (25-29), is the only one in the volume written in Romanian. The article briefly rehashes the form and function of definite articles in the two languages. Comparatively sound and with numerous illustrative examples, Petrenco's article is a helpful and adequate piece, yet one which makes no mention of critically important earlier works of this kind, such as Gălăbov (1962).

"The Fatherland and Forefatherland in the Works of Bessarabian Bulgarian Writers" (30-36) by Nadežda Popaz is an excellent examination of the role played

by Bessarabian Bulgarian writers, particularly poets, such as P. Burlak-Vulkanov, G. Barbarov, N. Stojanov, T. Stojanov and T. Tanasova, in the preservation of Bulgarian ethnos, culture and language in Moldova. "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where are my roots? Where is my fatherland?" These are the questions they have asked and tried to answer in their works. Popaz quotes a number of inspiring lyric passages — and provides a rather extensive list of sources with 18 — by these authors, among which N. Stojanov's Умират бащините къщи, а редом пролетта бучи ... Умират също като хора, в степта зелена на Буджак 'Our fathers' houses are dying, and spring is roaring right alongside them ... People are dying, too, on the green steppe of the Budzhak,' from "*Bašinite kăšti*" in *Sjalata bolka na Besarabia* (34).

Tatjana Rakovčena's "New Perspectives on the Bulgarian Language in Moldovan Schools" (37-40) is a bit disappointing, if for no other reason than length; it laments the situation with Bulgarian language in the Moldovan educational system for the past decade. Rakovčena criticizes the Moldovan curriculum, its teachers and materials, all of which she claims have been ineffective in the promotion of Bulgarian language and culture. Yet surprisingly effective and quite entertaining is Larisa Domusči's "Customs for the Summoning of Rain in the Town of Taraclia (Moldova)" (41-48). She discusses the ritual of calling for rain — *peperuda* — by placing the ritual in a historical context and giving variations on symbols and lyrics.

"Some Problems of Sociolinguistic Research into the Study of the Language Situation in the City of Comrat: Methods for Collecting Start-up Materials" (45-48) by Eleonora Georgieva addresses problems associated with collecting data in a city such as Comrat with its multiple-language presence and multi-ethnic makeup. Although the article is rather bland, dealing with methodology of data collection, it does make an interesting reference to the work of the American dialectologist William Labov (Labov 1966).

Vasil Kondov's "The Bulgarian Language in the Republic of Moldova's Schools" (49-54) is another of BEM's high quality articles. Very critical of the government's attempts to promote education in the South of Moldova in *Bulgarian*, Kondov, retraces the attempts by Chişinău at implementing linguistic educational reform as far back as 1985 and characterizes them as failures. The most obvious problem, he claims, is a lack of qualified teachers. Bulgarian in the schools where it is offered — a chart is given in the article (54) which shows detailed statistics on student enrollment in Bulgarian classes in the various towns

where it is offered and/or used in the curriculum — has not reached the level envisioned a decade ago (*cf.* Dyer [forthcoming]).

“Problems in the Teaching of the Bulgarian Language in Moldovan Schools” (55-59) by Natalija Pitelova addresses the problem of teaching standard Bulgarian to non-standard dialect speakers of Bulgarian in the South of Moldova. Pitelova takes us through the dialect-specific features of Taraclia Bulgarian, covering all of phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis. The article is quite good and builds on a tradition of Bulgarian dialectological studies initiated by Soviet linguists and continued by Moldovan scholars themselves.²

The longest, and fittingly, the final offering in BEM is Roman Raceev’s “The Axiological Aspect of Bulgarian Proverbs with the Structure ‘Better Bad Than Nothing At All ...’” (60-71). Raceev strings together a historical perspective on this type of proverb as he periodizes them from the beginning of the 19th century to the present and attributes various types to a number of Bulgarian authors, among whom Ljuben Karavelov, Aleksandăr Teodorov-Balan and Stefan Mladenov. Also important, claims Raceev, are the scholars such as Ivan Dujčev who have studied these proverbs extensively. Several examples illustrate the type referred to above: По-добре да изгубиш живота, а не доброто си име ‘Better to lose your life than your good name’; По-добре е да даваш, а не да искаш ‘Better to give than to want’; С тебе, жено, зле, а без тебе по-зле ‘Oh, wife, it’s hard to live with you, but harder to live without you.’ Raceev makes the unremarkable claim in his closing remarks (71-72) that these types of proverbs are a clear reflection of Bulgarian culture and the Bulgarian way of looking at life.

Bălgarskijat ezik v Moldova has its shortcomings. No doubt the volume is too small to be considered by many a serious work, and it contains several less than inspiring pieces. Yet to me, the volume’s brevity is no hindrance. Rather, we should be inspired by less to see more scholarship from the Moldovan Bulgarianists. Their work is indeed distinguished and deserving of a larger audience. Some of the material in the volume — the articles by Červenkov, Cankov, Popaz, Kondov and Pitelova, in particular — are models of scholarship. We should all look forward to more from this group of researchers in the future.

Notes

0. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Valentina Iepuri of Moldova State University and Nikolaj Červenkov of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences for their assistance in securing materials that helped in the production of this manuscript.

1. These works are: Dmitriev, N.K. 1962. *Stroj tjurkskix jazykov*. Moscow; Syčeva, V.I. 1973. "Arabskie i persidskie zaimstvovanija v leksičeskom sostave gagauzskogo jazyka," *Sovetskaja tjurkologija* 4, pp. 24-30; and Syčeva, V.I. 1974. *Arabskie i persidskie leksičeskie zaimstvovanija v gagauzskom jazyke*, Doctoral Dissertation (Moscow); Kolca, E.K. 1965. "Fonetičeskaja adaptacija zaimstvovanija slov (na materiale gagauzskogo jazyka)," *Limba ši literatura moldovenjaskè* 4, pp. 51-58; and Kolca, E.K. 1966. "Morfoložičeskaja adaptacija slavjanskix i moldavskix leksičeskix zaimstvovanij v gagauzskoj jazykovoju srede," *Limba ši literatura moldovenjaskè* 3, pp. 36-43; Kolca, E.K. 1967. "Nabludenija nad leksičeskimi zaimstvovanijami gagauzskogo jayka iz slavjanskogo i moldavskogo jazykov," *Vostočnoslavjansko-moldavskie jazykovye vzaimotnošenija* 2, pp. 148-55; and Kolca, E.K. 1980. "Nekotorye voprosy vzaimodejstvija jazykov juga Moldavii," *Etjudy moldavskoj filologii. Šišmarevskie čtenija*, pp. 94-108.

2. Earlier studies of Moldovan varieties of Bulgarian carried out by Soviet linguists include the dialectological series *Sta' i i materialy po bolgarskoj dialektologii*, edited by Bernštejn (1951-1961) and the *Atlas bolgarskix govorov v SSSR*, edited by Bernštejn, Češko and Zelenina (1958). For a comprehensive look at the positioning of Bulgarian within Moldovan society, see Dyer (1999, 2002b); and for the possibility of a Bessarabian *Sprachbund* which contains an integrated Bulgarian, Dyer (2002a).

References

- Bernštejn, S.B. (ed.). 1951-1961. *Sta' i i materialy po bolgarskoj dialektologii*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.
- Bernštejn, S.B., E.V. Češko and E.I. Zelenina (eds). 1958. *Atlas bolgarskix govorov v SSSR*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.
- Cankov, Kiril (ed.). 2002. *Bălgarskijat ezik v Moldova*. Komrat: Znak '94.
- Dončev, Tošo, Svetla K'oseva and Petăr Petrov (eds). 1995. *Bălgarite v sredna i iztočna Evropa*. Sofia: Sv. Kliment Ohridski.
- Dyer, Donald L. 1999. *The Romanian Dialect of Moldova: A Study in Language and Politics*, Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- _____. 2001. "Problemy jazyka, istorii i kul'tury bolgarskoj diaspory v Moldove i Ukraine 'Problems of Language, History and Culture of the

- Bulgarian Diaspora in Moldova and Ukraine' by S.Z. Novakov, G.A. Gajdarži, P.F. Stojanov and N.N. Červenkov and Bulgarian Studies in Moldova," *Balkanistica* 14, pp. 145-52.
- _____. 2002a. "Moldova and the Balkans: One Sprachbund or Two?" *Of All the Slavs My Favorites: Studies in South Slavic and Balkan Linguistics in Honor of Howard I. Aronson on the Occasion of His 66th Birthday*, Friedman, Victor A. and Donald L. Dyer (eds.), Columbus, Ohio, pp. 117-38.
- _____. 2002b. "The Bulgarians of Moldova and Their Language," *Current Trends in Caucasian, East European and Inner Asian Linguistics*, Holisky, Dee Ann, and Kevin Tuite (eds), Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 48-59.
- _____. Forthcoming. "Diasporic Bulgarian in a Multilingual Moldova: Valea Perjei, Taraclia and Their Departure from the Norm," *Die Welt der Slaven*.
- Gajdarži, G., E. Kolca, L. Pokrovskaja and B. Tukan. 1973. *Gagauzsko-russko-moldavskij slovar'*. Moscow.
- Gălăbov, Ivan. 1962. *Problemăt za člena v Bălgarski i Rumănski ezik*. Sofia: Bălgarska Akademija na Naukite.
- Grek, I.F. (ed.). 1999. *Istorija i kul'tura bolgar i gagauzov Moldovy i Ukrainy*. Kišinev: SŠB.
- Grek, Ivan, and Nikolaj Červenkov (eds). 1993. *Bălgarite ot Ukraina i Moldova, minalo i nastojašte*, Sofia: Izdatelska kăšta Hristo Botev.
- Labov, William. 1966. *Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Mitev, Petăr-Emil, and Nikolaj Červenkov (eds). 1996. *Besarabskite Bălgari za sebe si*, Sofia: Meždunaroden centăr po problemite na malcinstvata i kulturnite vzaimodejstvija.
- Novakov, S.Z., G.A. Gajdarži, P.F. Stojanov and N.N. Červenkov (eds). 1993. *Problemy jazyka, istorii i kul'tury bolgarskoj diaspory v Moldove i na Ukraine*. Kišinev: Štiinca.
- _____. 1995. *Stranici istorii i etnografii bolgar Moldovy i Ukraine*. Kišinev: Štiinca.
- Čelak, Ekaterina. 1999. *Učilišnoto delo i kulturno-prosvetnijat život na Bălgarskite preselnici v Besarabija (1856-1878)*. Sofia: LIK.
- Červenkov, Nikolaj, Lazar Georgiev, Strašimir Dimitrov and Stefan Dojnov (eds). 1996. *Bălgarija v sărceto mi Sbornik, posveten na 60-godišnata ot roždienieto na Konstantin Poglubko*. Sofia: Rodoznanie.