

Minority Languages in the Post-Soviet World: A Case Study of Ukrainian in the Republic of Moldova

Valentina Iepuri

Working Papers Series

Department of Modern Languages



The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has created conditions in which its former republics previously united by the same state language and political system could change their language policy. The analysis of language shifts in implementing new language laws and restructuring educational systems in these countries offers a unique contribution to contemporary theories of language policy, minority rights and language education. It is surprising that the post-Soviet context as a whole has been largely ignored in the scholarship on language policy and bi- and multilingualism (Pavlenko 2008:2).

Of special interest in this case is the study of minority languages in the Republic of Moldova, the second smallest republic of the former Soviet Union, which has been a multiethnic society for centuries. More than 70% of its population today are ethnic Moldovans with the rest of the population consisting of ethnic minorities: Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, Jews and other nationalities. Ukrainians form the largest ethnic minority in the country, and their language has been significantly influenced by contacts with other languages in the region, in particular Russian and Romanian/Moldovan. There are very few scholarly publications about the Ukrainian dialect of Moldova (most of the publications are predominantly on the Ukrainian culture and history). This presentation will analyze the current status and sociolinguistic functions of the Ukrainian language in Moldova (as compared to the Soviet period), will provide the latest data on the use of Ukrainian in different Moldovan territorial areas and will outline lexical and grammatical peculiarities of the Ukrainian dialect in one of the northern districts of Moldova located on the border with Ukraine. Among the issues addressed in this presentation will be the following: the survival and use of the Ukrainian language in the territory of Moldova (historic aspects and its development processes), contacts with other languages in the region, and language interference. Special attention will be paid to the linguistic phenomenon of *surzhyk*, the combination of Russian and Ukrainian in Moldovan dialect of Ukrainian.