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**Titel:** Report on the current linguistic status of the Tatar minority in Romania

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**Ort:** Wiesbaden

**Jahr:** 2016

**PURL:** [https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?666048797\\_0020](https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?666048797_0020) | LOG\_0035

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## Reports

### Report on the current linguistic status of the Tatar minority in Romania

Sînziana Preda

Preda, Sînziana 2016. Report on the current linguistic status of the Tatar minority in Romania. *Turkic Languages* 20, 274–285.

The rediscovery and reconfiguration of ethnic identities in postsocialist Romania raises, in the case of the historical minorities, the question of the status of bilingual speakers who today face a double challenge. On the one hand, the attitude towards their mother tongue has changed as compared to that of the previous generations, against the background of the expansion of the obligatory public education system in the Romanian language and of education within Romanian culture. On the other hand, the minor cultures of the small ethnic communities (from the nation states that emerged in the Balkans in the modern age) are strongly affected by the consequences of the globalization process, a process that levels differences, changes the frameworks of alterity, and modifies perceptions regarding the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of less visible communities. Their linguistic identity cannot compete with the dominant languages and is affected by the influence of the (American) English language and of the culture it promotes, which in a certain sense is a mass culture with a levelling effect. In this report, I attempt to give a picture of these interactions and developments. This is a summary of a case study on the Tatar language in Dobruja carried out within the research project “Cultural Heritage and Identity Dynamics in the Tatar Community of Dobroudja”.

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In Dobruja, the history of the Tatars was closely connected with the destiny of a related population, the Turks, and the prevalence of the Turkish culture marked the culture and the language of groups that came from the Crimea and Eastern European steppes centuries ago.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the 13th century, historical sources confirm the presence of Tatars in Dobruja, and the power they exerted under the leadership of Berke Khan, Batu Khan’s successor. In the 16th century, the Venetian ambassador Marco Vernier mentioned that 40,000 Tatars had been settled in Dobruja, which explains the name given to the region “Tatarskoe Pole” [Tatar Country] (Akmolla

1 This work was supported by a grant from the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS—UEFISCDI, project number PNII-RU-TE-2012-3-0077.

2011: 231). Within the Dobruja Tatar minority, we can distinguish between the Noghay and the Crimean Tatar (*Kırım*). “Mehmet Ablay speaks about groups of Tatars that had been settling in Dobruja in the 13th century, when this area was ruled by commandant Nogay” (Bechir (2008: 27). Dimitrie Cantemir writes about 30,000 Noghay brought to the Budjak area by the order of Sultan Selim II in 1568 (Ibram 2007: 147). The Noghay see themselves as the “real Tatars”, believing that they came to Dobruja around 1200, maybe earlier<sup>2</sup> than the Dobruja Tatar. They perceive themselves as less subjected to the acculturation process, because they preserve old traditions and have the habit of marrying within their community. An important wave of Dobruja Tatars arrived after 1783, the year when Crimea was integrated into the Russian Empire. In the year 1860, one can estimate that 60,000 Tatars were living in Dobruja (Ibram 2007: 147). Today it is hard to assess the size of each group; what is well known is that today the Noghay represent a small community, and lives predominantly in villages like Mihail Kogălniceanu, Lumina, Valea Dacilor and Ciocârlia de Jos. The Crimean Tatar constitute the largest Tatar group in the region, speaking a Turkic variety different from Noghay. In most localities (especially in Constanța county), one can find mixed Tatar and Turkish population<sup>3</sup> (there are some places where Turks are concentrated, like the Măcin Mountains area, in northern part of Dobruja). Turkish has a great number of speakers many of whom are Tatars, but very few Turks learn the Tatar language (sometimes in mixed marriages).

The Noghay and the Dobruja Tatar speak Kipchak Turkic varieties while the Turkish spoken in Dobruja belongs to the Oghuz branch. Nowadays, Turkish continues to prevail over Tatar, mainly due to its introduction into the state school system in the early 1990s. Before the onset of communism, in Romania, there were Turkish schools where pupils studied regardless of which of the three Muslim groups they belonged to. In fact, until only a few years there was Tatar language teaching in Dobruja; this information was rarely mentioned during fieldwork, because it had no powerful impact in Tatar communities. The textbooks were brought from Kazan, capital of Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, but this Tatar language was different from the Turkic variety spoken in Dobruja. Our interlocutors did not consider the Kazan Tatar language as their mother tongue. For about a decade, children were forced to learn the Kazan Tatar language written in the Cyrillic alphabet; this experiment ended in the late 1950s, in the context of the communist party’s decision to close the ethnic minorities schools.

2 Female, Tatar, informal discussion in Constanța, September, 2013.

3 The last official census in Romania (2011) gives a total number of 20,282 Tatars and 27,698 Turks—according to “Populația după etnie—macroregiuni, regiuni de dezvoltare, județe și categorii de localități”, retrieved from <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/>.

The cultivation of Turkish is also supported by the Republic of Turkey,<sup>4</sup> which protects the Dobruja community, considering it to be part of the diaspora. The most important support comes from the UDTR (Uniunea Democrată Turcă din România/The Turkish Democratic Union of Romania); the two Unions' <sup>5</sup> publications (*Hakses* and *Karadeñiz*)<sup>6</sup> include in every issue information about the linguistic identity of the members of the community. In Dobruja, a mass media in Turkish has developed; this includes *Zaman* (<http://zamanromania.ro>), the Romanian edition of the Turkish *Zaman* newspaper (Vainovski-Mihai 2015: 475); radio stations (for instance, "Radio T", which also has programmes in Tatar); and books on various topics, brought from the Republic of Turkey. The spread of the Turkish language explains the fact that a great number of Tatar native speakers also speak Turkish (to varying degrees). Nevertheless, for many Tatars and Turks—especially the generations born after 1989—the first language learned remains Romanian. Alongside their long-standing partner, the Constanța County School Inspectorate, the respective organizations of the Turks and Tatars initiate and sponsor activities whose aim is the promotion and cultivation of their languages, and which give awards to schoolchildren, the segment of the population seen as the main source of hope concerning the future of these Turkic varieties.

Attending classes on language, culture and Islam has created an ambitious student community, as demonstrated by the contests and Olympiads that attract mainly lower secondary school students. The students' involvement means far more than merely learning grammar; the socialization that takes place during the activities for the consolidation of linguistic identity facilitates bonding, and in the long run strengthens the cohesion of the ethnic group. Spoken *with the parents*, and most often *with the grandparents*, the language of the forefathers and the effort to learn how to speak it fluently *is also a pleasure*.<sup>7</sup> Youth camps are the best opportunity to practise it and to become better acquainted with the members of the community, especially when the community is scattered across a sprawling city. *Over there, they*

4 The spiritual and material support from Turkey also materialized in the opening of the "Yunus Emre" Turkish Cultural Centre of Constanța, in 2011. The spiritual identity was reinforced by the opening of The National College Kemal Atatürk (Colegiul Național "Kemal Atatürk"), a school that reawakened the tradition of the old Muslim Seminary at Medgidia. Several courses are taught in Turkish and some of the teaching staff are Turkish citizens. Founded in 1995 as the result of an agreement between Romania and Turkey, this institution represents a step in the training of Muslim clergy; in several places, where the Tatars and Turks attend the same mosques, the Republic of Turkey has sent imams who assist their local colleagues.

5 U.D.T.T.M.R. (Democratic Union of the Turkish-Muslim Tatars in Romania, in Romanian: Uniunea Democrată a Tătarilor Turco—Musulmani din România).

6 Within *Karadeñiz*, a special section—*Kadınlar Dünyası*—is dedicated to the Tatar women (for almost three years, *Kadınlar Dünyası* appeared as a supplement publication).

7 Informal discussion with students who attended Tatar language classes at the community school, Constanța U.D.T.T.M.R. branch, October 2013.

*spoke only Tatar, some games—that they know: “The country needs soldiers”, and I don’t know what else—we translated them! into the Tatar language, and they only spoke in Tatar. [...] We also performed plays, we learned songs... they made friends, they got used to speaking Tatar there!*<sup>8</sup> The activities, regardless of their nature (didactic, cultural, artistic), aim to encourage the younger generations to get involved in the renewal of the identity construct; one of the ways of doing this involves taking on the language of the ethnic group of one’s origin as part of one’s personal identity, and not as an exotic element which only remains relevant within family or community ceremonies. Tatar Union is always looking to revive, to strengthen the sense of belonging to a people once well-known and feared. In recent history, this pride was diluted by the totalitarian regime; during the last decades, the Tatars (like other minorities in Romania) were undergoing denationalization, a process that diminished their sense of ethnicity.

In the context outlined above, the current leadership of the U.D.T.T.M.R. set out to recuperate a territory little exploited in the past 25 years. The most important initiative is the opening of the *community school*, a programme for the study of the mother tongue, which takes place at U.D.T.T.M.R. branches in towns and villages with significant ethnic Tatar communities. *Within the unions [the local branches of the Tatar Union], the representatives of the community wanted the pupils of that particular community to study. They don’t study in schools, but at union branches, yet with a teacher, who takes on the responsibility of teaching these children.*<sup>9</sup> The greatest obstacle—which also explains the delay in introducing Tatar into the state school system—is the lack of trained teachers.<sup>10</sup> *We don’t yet have a qualified Tatar language teacher, because there is no Tatar language department where our teachers could get a qualification. They can study, they can get a qualification over there, in Crimea, in Ukraine. But for now we have no teacher.*<sup>11</sup> The situation in the Crimean Peninsula means that such training is out of the question; discussions have however taken place between the leaders of the Union and the representatives of the Tatar Language Department at the Technical and Pedagogical University of Simferopol regarding the study of the language for the first grade and the preparatory grade (Ismail 2008). In 2008, it was decided that the Tatar language would be taught to children in Constanța, Medgidia, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Eforie

8 N. I., teacher, informal discussion with students who attend Tatar language classes at the community school, Constanța U.D.T.T.M.R. branch, October 2013.

9 I. A., born 1976, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Techirghiol, August 28, 2014.

10 “They’ve made some Tatar language textbooks, but who teaches them? Because I know the generation, most of them are my age, the teachers, and they speak the Tatar I speak as well, maybe even less than I do.” I. M., born 1977, male, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Constanța, July 26, 2013.

11 V. B., born 1968, female, Turk. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Constanța, September 6, 2013.

Sud, Lumina, Tuzla and Cobadin. Moreover, in Constanța, at School No. 12—which still hosts courses of the community school—a Tatar language teaching room was set up (Chermăneanu (2008).

The obstacles that lie in the way of teacher training are being overcome, for now, with the help of the community school. In 2013, it was attended by about 200 students.<sup>12</sup> For grades I to IV, *we have one teacher for each grade, who gathers the ethnic Tatar children in the school and sets up an optional course in Tatar customs and traditions. (So, not Tatar language?)—Not the language proper, because we don't yet have Tatar language specialists. (But this optional course is held, is taught in...?)—I went to observe my colleagues who work with the children and I saw it; during the whole class, they all speak in Tatar, and everything is explained in the Tatar language. (How many teachers are there?)—There are around five schools in the system at the moment where they study it, as far as I know, but three of these have the approval of the Inspectorate, at the high school in Kogălniceanu, at Lumina and at Techirghiol.*<sup>13</sup> The courses held at the U.D.T.T.M.R. branches<sup>14</sup> remain the most important way of transmitting Tatar in a literary and systematic form. Language acquisition in the online environment has not been successful either. “The Revival of the Tatar Language”, an event held in 2010 during the World Congress of Crimean Tatars, suggested training those who teach at the community school through the website [www.tatars.eu](http://www.tatars.eu) (Bocai (2010). However, in our interviews no information emerged on the use of this means of improving one's knowledge of the subject. Teachers continue to find their own ways to improve themselves, and hope for the establishment of a training program at academic level, in a multicultural university, where Tatar might be taught alongside Turkish (Borș 2015).

In fact, over the past years, a tendency of differentiating the Turkish and Tatar languages has become evident, against the background of increasing interest in the topic of ethnic identity not only among scholars, but also the broader public. The change is taking place after a long period in which the (not only linguistic) identity of the Muslim community was indiscriminately described by the levelling phrase “Turkish-Tatar”. The separation of the two components did not seem necessary at a time when neither of the languages could be studied in primary or secondary school,

12 V. B.

13 I. A.

14 “Here, where we live, [in Cobadin], I could say, first of all, there are about 30 Tatars who attend our classes at the community school. (What age groups are they?)—Between 4 and 13 years old, maybe 14; 4–14 years old; but these 30 don't always come. For example, they come (They take turns.)—They take turns. But if there's an important activity, we gather 30 or more. That's how many we gathered. But our community school is attended by 10, 15, 17, so the number... (When is it held?)—Every Sunday, for two hours. (Only Tatar language?)—Only Tatar.” S. M., 30 years, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Melinda Dincă in Cobadin, July 25, 2013.

and ethnic cultures could not be cultivated and affirmed without restrictions. With the transformations that occurred in the last quarter century, however, (and) as a result of the actions of the U.D.T.T.M.R., the programme of linguistic revival became one of the most important arguments in favour of the perpetuation and preservation of ethnic character. For a long time, the Tatar language was limited to the status of a vernacular language (and a confessional language, in homogeneous communities), and the speakers saw their own dialect as one which had a restricted circulation and had no perspectives for the future, in Romania or anywhere else in the world. To this is added the high regard for the Turkish language<sup>15</sup> and the fact that Romanian was perceived as the language of everyday use, in all areas of life. However, social circumstances can be overcome if there is a project that supports the mother tongue, and when these aspirations are voiced. *For the Tatar language, that's what we need, we need for the Tatars, the families, to request it.*<sup>16</sup>

The view that the Tatar language is archaic, with no future in today's society, meant that the interest in promoting it has remained low. It seems to have affected the status of Tatar far more than the absence of qualified teachers. In contrast, the revival promoted by the team at the Tatar Union favours this isolated dialect, preserved due to the conservation of a spirit of difference, even against the background of a common language and of the cultural similarities between Turks and Tatars. "Turkish and Tatar didn't mingle for years, despite their similarity and proximity, precisely because there is a consciousness of one's own identity."<sup>17</sup> The organization has invested resources and has organized numerous activities aimed at supporting the Dobruja Tatar language,<sup>18</sup> as part of a policy for the consolidation of ethnic character. If, two decades ago, the image of the two minorities was captured in one unifying image, "Turkish-Tatar", in recent years, and in the view of U.D.T.T.M.R. leaders, one can notice an attempt at differentiation, at the distinct assertion of what is "purely Tatar". This does not affect the Turkic component of the Dobruja Tatars' identity. Their origin, as well as their partially common history (in Dobruja) are by no means challenged. The change in mentality has crystallized over time, in pace with the changing needs of Tatar and Turkish communities. For some of the Tatars, it became important to consolidate the position of their language,<sup>19</sup>

15 "The Turks have a language that's more classy, and we're more...you know...as if you were talking in Moldavian, you know? That's what it's like." Z. B., born 1946, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Techirghiol, August 28, 2014.

16 S. M.

17 Nihat Osman, in Macri (2010: 38).

18 For example, towards the end of 2013, U.D.T.T.M.R. awarded prizes for the activity of 22 teachers who taught Tatar at various branches of the organization—Ghiulşen Ismail-Iusuf, *Gala de premiere a excelenței în educație a cadrelor didactice de etnie turco-tătară*, in *Karadeñiz* no. 11 (246)/2013, p. 14.

19 "I like this book, I'll do it together with them"—the mother says, after she looks over the alphabet book, and then repeats, decisively: "I'll study alongside them!". She seems sorry for not having spoken to the children in the mother tongue. That's because she kept

starting, for instance, from an understanding of the importance of a system of education in the mother tongue, and of the role played by systematic study, one generation after another.

The fact that Tatar children learn Turkish has added even more urgency to the issue of the systematic study of their own language. Young people are more likely to be exposed to the influence of Turkish, by means of TV programmes, radio, and by studying it at school. What is more, “the Tatar language is very difficult. We are not bilingual, like, for instance, the Romanians in Spain or Italy. We must make great efforts and use all available means, including legislation, to make our youth learn the Tatar language” (Codău 2013). *The Tatar language, we’re striving to introduce it in the curriculum; for now, we teach it here, at the community school. On Sundays.*<sup>20</sup> (*How are you trying to introduce it into the curriculum?*)—*So, for instance, we succeeded, I mean, the Union succeeded, so in many [towns], in Eforie, Mangalia, Medgidia, they already teach it.*<sup>21</sup> In the autumn of 2013, five schools (within the official educational system) were reported to have taught Tatar. They received approval to function from the Constanța County School Inspectorate (in Techirghiol, Lumina, Mihail Kogălniceanu). *I’ve heard that they also study it in Medgidia and a few other places, but it was not with the approval of the ISJ [Inspectoratul Școlar Județean, The County School Inspectorate]. (Why?)—Because they didn’t apply for it in time.*<sup>22</sup> The project of introducing Tatar in grades I to IV is an older goal of the community. In 2008, during a summer school, possible syllabi were discussed for teaching Tatar as an optional mother tongue, the first teachers being trained by peers from the Department of Tatar Language and Literature at the University of Sevastopol (Dragomir 2008). All these actions testify to the need that some of the community members feel to preserve one of the main components of their ethnic being: “We are a minority and we want our language to survive. We want our children to speak their mother tongue”.<sup>23</sup>

The desire to speak the language fluently, naturally, is voiced by the older generations in particular. In the view of the older members of the community, their language has reached a state of crisis. Those who wish to improve the situation make use of all available opportunities, of all contexts in which they can initiate conversations with children or with young people. *We tried to tell them something in Tatar, to fetch a glass of water, he answered in Romanian and, gradually, when he enrolled in the first... When they enrolled in the first grade, they...It’s our fault, we*

remembering her childhood, when she went to the kindergarten and she turned back halfway, crying in shame because she could only speak Tatar. She didn’t want her own children to go through that.”— D. Macri, *cited article*, p. 38.

20 At Cobadin. In other places, such as at the Constanța U.D.T.T.M.R. branch, community school classes take place on Saturdays.

21 S. M.

22 I. A.

23 Icbal Anefi in Dragomir (2008).

*already spoke in Romanian and we've been speaking with them in Romanian ever since. If these children, mine and the others', if they had stayed near their grandparents—who spoke less Romanian—they could have learned it too...At least as much as I can speak Tatar. But we, the parents, err, we made a mistake, or we're still making a mistake, and they took advantage of it. Now, nmmn, it's hard to...*<sup>24</sup>

Their explanations vacillate between resignation, regret and a belief in an implacable evolution of the society towards uniformity. Despite a certain amount of pessimism, those who were educated and learned how to think in their mother tongue<sup>25</sup> are engaged (formally and informally) in transmitting as substantial a part of their cultural heritage as possible, a process which is difficult/impossible to achieve without resorting to the language that defines that particular heritage. They are one of the active segments of the community, and are not discouraged by the relatively low interest in the study of a language considered by some of the young people (and not only by them) as “minor”. (*Do your grandchildren speak Tatar?*)—*Not really, but they understand. We, the old ones, who speak to them, they understand the language. But speaking—not any more. But they take Tatar classes. (And is there any hope that they'll learn the language very well?)—Yes, yes, yes, yes.*<sup>26</sup>—*They learn poems, stories...*<sup>27</sup> Attitudes towards the degree to which the ethnic group's language is used differ depending on the interlocutor's criteria. Optimism about the future is based, on the one hand, on the project of the community school, and on the other hand on the feeling that the situation is in any case better than during the communist period, when studying of the language was an unattainable dream.

A comparison between the language ability of the elderly and of today's youth leads to pessimistic conclusions. More often than not, the researcher uses a comparative perspective, relying on the factual and the quantitative: what used to be and what (no longer) is. Equally often, the interlocutors (not just the elderly) describe (with feelings of nostalgia, sadness, and grief) a golden age of the mother tongue, of communication which fostered the group's community spirit, in contrast to a degraded present, in which Tatar is only used in exceptional circumstances or,

24 N. D., born 1948, male, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Techirghiol, August 28, 2014.

25 “(What language do you speak with your sister?)—Romanian. (Because...?)—Because it's easier! You know what it's like! You start talking the way you think. And because...(In that case, is there a difference between grandparents and grandchildren in this respect? I mean, the grandparents speak Tatar, so they think in Tatar?)—Yes, at least grandmother; she knew very few words of Romanian. (Can we say there's a Tatar way of thinking, or...?)—No, but living in Romania, thinking, we think 95% in Romanian, right? And then it's also easier for us to express ourselves in Romanian.” A. I., born 1977, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Techirghiol, August 28, 2014.

26 M. C., 78 years, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Melinda Dincă in Ovidiu, April 2014.

27 I. T., born 1932, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Melinda Dincă in Ovidiu, April 2014.

in any case, is far from the everyday use of the past. The analysis of the (dis)continuous instances of contact with the language provided data on the fluctuation of the degree of attachment towards the mother tongue, but also invites an exploration of the factors/circumstances that determine different attitudes towards the languages that the subjects were exposed to. At a personal level, the transition from the orality of the preschool age (until enrolment in 1st grade, a certain level of Tatar language is acquired due to the almost exclusive contact with native speakers), to the acquisition of writing skills (only in the state language) generated a gradual recasting of one's personal belief system, of one's worldview.<sup>28</sup> At the level of the community, the retrospective assessment made by our interlocutors suggests that modernization (the term they use for the industrialization undertaken by Ceaușescu) reduced the interest in the cultivation of ethnicity in a period when the latter's value was no longer apparent. (*When you were in primary school, do you remember what language you spoke at home? Tatar as well?*)—*We spoke both Tatar and Romanian. So did our parents, coming from work, where they spoke Romanian, and at home...And our grandma used to scold us about it: "at least with the children you should speak Tatar, shouldn't you..." They spoke it for a while, and then we switched to Romanian again, until... (Was there any danger? Is that why she was against it?)—I don't know if she saw any danger in it, but she said that it was normal, it was natural that within a Tatar family one should speak Tatar.*<sup>29</sup> Detachment from a local identity (sometimes seen as an obstacle) also explains the estrangement from the mother tongue, whose use no longer seemed adequate to the new social and political circumstances.

Educated to an overwhelming extent in Romanian, the young ones express different attitudes regarding the relationship between language and identity. For most of them, the official language remains the language they know best.<sup>30</sup> Their attitudes depend on the nature of the languages themselves, on the intensity and the duration of their exposure to each of them,<sup>31</sup> on the cultural models acquired within

28 "The hypothesis according to which the form of the language and linguistic habits have a certain influence upon the way in which the external world is interpreted is confirmed by the works of the English anthropologist J. Goody, *La raison graphique* (1979). He shows that the use of writing, as opposed to spoken language, is a constraining factor on our way of thinking and acting."—Mondher Kilani, *Introduction à l'anthropologie*, Lausanne, Payot, 1989, p. 121 (according to Radu Răutu, translation in manuscript, for students' use).

29 A. I.

30 A relatively large number of Tatars are characterized by a threefold linguistic identity, since they also speak Turkish, in some cases better than Tatar. *I, for instance, teach Tatar; I speak Turkish maybe better than Tatar!* (S. M.)

31 Young people, but also their parents, conform to at least two types of multilingualism: *coordinate multilingualism*—"the languages are functionally separated, and their units are seen as expressing partially or totally distinct meanings (one language is used in official situations: administration, school, etc.; the other within the family, and among friends)"

the family, and on their personal interest in speaking the languages in question. (*Do you think that the Tatars who emigrated have changed since they moved to Istanbul?*)<sup>32</sup>—Yes, they've... They've become Turks, they no longer... I don't think they even call themselves Tatars any more. (*In what sense? Because they speak Turkish?*)—Yes, they only speak Turkish, you can imagine... We were like that too, actually. Now we speak Romanian more than Tatar.<sup>33</sup> The disappearance of the old dialects of the Dobruja Muslims is seen as affecting the fabric of their identity, the transmission of their ethnic spirit. To this is added the limited interest in their own culture, understood as a somewhat anachronistic body of knowledge. Socialization—much increased and diversified nowadays—encourages the use of the official language. *We only speak with our colleagues in Romanian, with our friends, in Romanian; my family speak in Tatar, I answer them in Romanian.*<sup>34</sup> The young people of the post-socialist period, educated within a globalized culture, are accustomed to using the language of the majority all the time; moving to another linguistic environment—that of the mother tongue, only spoken occasionally—requires adaptation, effort, in contrast to the ease with which it is handled by the generations who grew up speaking Turkish or Tatar on a daily basis.

### Conclusions

In the case of the Tatars, the issue of linguistic identity has gained ground as a result of the initiatives concerning the institutionalization of primary education in the Tatar language within the framework of the state school system. This very recent institutional factor not only marks a change in the status of the language, but also contributes to creating a positive image of the Tatar ethnic group, which desires to assert its own character. This affirmation does not entail a break from the neighbouring Turkish community, but merely expresses a desire to assert its long suppressed specificity. For reasons of a mainly political nature, historical circumstances have been less favourable to the Tatar than to the Turkish community. On the other hand, the dwindling number of speakers of both dialects is explained by the fact that successive generations have renounced the sustained cultivation of their own language; naturally, the phenomenon is also due to the pressure generated by transformations at the macrosocial level (such as the opening up and dissipation

and *asymmetrical multilingualism*—"there are differences in knowledge" between the two or more languages spoken—Nicolae Saramandu, Manuela Nevaci, *Multilingvism și limbi minoritare în România*, Cluj Napoca, Qual Media, 2009, p. 7.

32 In the Republic of Turkey there is a Tatar minority made up of individuals who migrated over the last century from Crimea and Dobruja. They settled not only in the capital, but also in Ankara and Eskişehir (the area with the largest Tatar population).

33 I. I., born 1992, male, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Constanța, July 27, 2013.

34 I. S. born 1995, female, Tatar. Interview conducted by Sînziana Preda in Constanța, September 22, 2013.

of village communities as a result of the industrialization process). No less important was a certain sense of inferiority felt by certain members of the traditional Tatar communities, a feeling which led to their attempt to integrate into the Romanian society of the latter half of the 20th century in order to demonstrate that they are just like everyone else, one of the ways of doing this being learning how to speak the state language correctly.<sup>35</sup>

The analysis of the linguistic behaviours of the historical minorities in Romanian post-socialist society shows that the dynamics of the practices connected to the mother tongue and the official language can only be understood by looking at its separate stages. The freedom brought by the 1990s has allowed the reassertion of individual linguistic identities at all levels of society; despite this fact, the decline of many minority languages might still be irreversible. One explanation is the connection between the mother tongue and another core element of identity construction, namely tradition. Many customs have been lost, while the language is spoken sporadically, and mostly by the elderly. This is generally the recurrent opening theme in the discourse of the community members when they are asked to describe the ethnic specificity of their group. Practising customs is associated with the patriarchal family, with a period when the community represented a protective environment, and the use of the language of the parents was the natural form of communication. *Our parents didn't speak Romanian with us at home. They spoke Tatar, right, within the family, even though you had Romanian neighbours, but you stuck to the traditions, and you... And during meals, you only spoke Tatar.*<sup>36</sup> The sense of community created by the permanent use of the mother tongue is seen nowadays as a value of the past. *You had Romanian neighbours, right, so you did speak it, but you used to stick to traditions more in those times, as parents...*<sup>37</sup> The elderly value the inherited language mainly as a means for the articulation of an oral and traditionalist culture. The use of the vernacular gives them a sense of community and of connection with the world they grew up in, a world whose mechanisms they knew and understood. In the view of the middle generations, the situation cannot be improved solely by the unilateral action of the Tatar Union; it requires the participation of all the members of the ethnic group. The language "is lost not only because of the young people, but especially because of those at home, their grandparents and their parents, who surely can still speak the language very well".<sup>38</sup> In other words, even if tradition can (still) be reinvented, language cannot.

35 C. M., born 1964, male, Tatar. Interview was conducted by Sînziana Preda in Constanța, September 2, 2013.

36 M. M., born 1961, female, Tatar. Interview was conducted by Sînziana Preda in Murfatlar, August 27, 2014.

37 M. M.

38 Narciz Amza, in Casimceali (2012: 32).

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