

Holidays, Fests and Celebrations of the Bessarabian Region: Linguo-cultural Peculiarities

Olena Chetverikova¹

Abstract: As a multicultural region, the Danubian Bessarabia is rich in traditionally celebrated holidays, fests and other socially important events. On the other hand, the XXI century linguistics is interested in the issues, connected with the interaction of lingual, ethnic and psychological factors as the embodiment of cultural people's pace. Linguo-culturological studies are focused on the linguistic signs, which are formed on the borderline of two different codes – lingual and cultural. Thus, language is understood as a national cultural treasure, which forms various linguistic phenomena, and mutual interdependence between culture and language show the degree of linguo-culturological competence of a native speaker and his culture. Our investigation aims to show the variability of traditionally celebrated holidays, study the salutation forms people greet and congratulate each other, investigate the periods of celebration and meals they usually have.

Keywords: linguo-culturology; holiday; celebration; fest; event; multicultural; the Danubian Bessarabia

There has been recently observed increasing interest of Ukrainians to their history, culture, and roots of the Ukrainian language, which is not only a communication tool, but also a phenomenon of human culture, which reflects and preserves the world of people's poetic ideas (Yermolenko 2007, p. 118). Contemporary investigations point out the importance of poly-cultural aspects in the preparation of university students. They formulate the issues of inter-cultural competence, which may be referred to as linguo-cultural competence. The term "competence" is used to characterize future specialists in their professional activity. It presupposes some amount of interiorized mobile knowledge and flexible way of thinking, helping to form an important fragment of the ethnic conceptual sphere.

National traditional investigation of ties between the elements of language and culture is rooted in the works of O.O. Potebnya, P.P. Gytetsky, I.J. Franko, and contemporary scholars, who based the prospects of investigation of this phenomenon and proposed to unite spiritual and intellectual worldviews of Ukrainians. According to L.Y. Mats'ko, ties between the Ukrainian language and its culture in broad sense

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine, Address: Repina St, 12, Izmail, Odessa Region, Ukraine, 68601, Tel.: +38 (04841)51388, Corresponding author: lena.shardulev@gmail.com.

are the base for the formation and development of the Ukrainian linguistic ethno-genesis, cultural ethno-genesis and national genesis (Mats'ko, 2009, p. 349).

Despite the fact, that some peculiar features of Ukrainian life has been the object of close linguistic attention, the signs of contemporary Bessarabian culture, verbalized in the naming of various holidays, rituals, traditions and festivals, have not been included into the circle of issues, previously raised and solved by the researchers. It may help to penetrate into ethnic and cultural specificity of man's mentality and guide to the depths of ethnic experience, presenting language as a symbolic key to unlimited cultural treasures.

Considerable interest from the point of view of modern approach is paid to the investigation of different rituals, which are known to be one of the essential features of man's being. Ritual man's activity is historically grounded and represents constantly repeated stereotypical actions usually possessing sacral force and performing a complex of specific functions (Dronova & Zeleneva, 2008, p. 64).

Eastern Orthodox Christianity dominates among the beliefs of Southern Ukrainians. In western Ukraine most people support Eastern Catholic or Greek Catholic religion, which unites Orthodox rites and Catholic rules. Holidays may combine sacral religious and folk primitive traditions. In Southern Danubian Bessarabia to widely spread religious holidays we relate various ones. For example:

Orthodox Christmas Day (Різдво), celebrated on the 7th of January;

feast of the Baptism of Jesus Christ (Водохрещення Ісуса Христа), celebrated on the 18/19th of January;

Orthodox Easter Day (Пасхальні свята), the greatest holiday celebrated following the religious lunar-solar calendar, which makes Easter a transitional holiday;

Feast of the Trinity, also known as *Orthodox Pentecost* (Святоправославної П'ятидесятниці) the celebration of which depends on the day of celebration of Easter;

Ascension of The Lord (Вознесіння Господнє);

Transfiguration of The Lord (Преображення Господнє),

Dormition of The Mother of God (Успіння Божої Матері), celebrated on the 28th of August.

We may see that all the named holidays describe some important event of religious character (*Ascension, Transfiguration*), or the result of some event (*Christmas Day, Easter Day*), which is usually accompanied by the word "day", and are structurally multi-component. In folk tradition, full holiday names are often reduced to one word (*Dormition, Baptism*).

Christmas is a very important religious celebration for Orthodox Christians, it falls second to Easter, which is considered the most important holiday in the religious calendar. Religiously minded people, who are part of the Eastern Orthodox Church, prepare themselves for Christmas with 40 days of fasting, continuing right up until late on Christmas Eve January 6th. There exists a tradition to break the fast with a celebratory meal. It is taken either when the first star appears on Christmas Eve, or in the morning after the church service. The usual greeting phrase is: *Christ is born—we glorify Him* (Христос народився – славимо Його). Children traditionally sing Christmas songs, known as “*Shchedrivky*”, which describe the celebrated events and commemorate them. They sometimes dress like angels in white clothes, in order to imitate the angels, who informed the shepherds about the birth of Christ.

In Danubian Bessarabia people traditionally have a pine-tree, or a fur-tree, or a branch from a tree as a symbol of everlasting life and that Jesus Christ is entering their homes and hearts. Lighting candles in honor of Jesus is another tradition, which symbolizes the on-going prayer.

Christmas food in Bessarabia is very different from the traditional turkey or roast ham of Western Christianity. That does not mean that people have no meat. They may serve roasted or fried beef, chicken, pork and often fish. In Ukraine the Christmas Eve feast often contains twelve different foods (symbolizing the twelve apostles), including the traditional *Kutia* (Кутя) made from cooked wheat with honey, poppy seeds, raisins and various nuts. The seeds are treated as a symbol of hope for the year ahead.

Conceptually the core element *Christmas* unites in its periphery such elements as: *Christmas service*, *Christmas traditions*, *Christmas salutations*, *Christmas songs*, *Christmas meals*, *Christmas decorations*, which all together picture the whole view of Christmas celebrations.

Danubian Bessarabia celebrates the same state holidays as the other parts of Ukraine. Among them are: *New Year's Day*, celebrated on the 1st of January, *Ukrainian Unity Day*, celebrated on the 22nd of January, *International Women's Day*, celebrated on the 8th of March, *Labor Day*, celebrated on the 1st of May, *Victory Day/Memorial Day*, celebrated on the 9th of May, *Independence Day*, celebrated on the 24th of August and so on. The named holidays have the noun “*day*”, which aims to attract attention to the described word (*Unity*, *Independence*, *Victory*, *Labour*).

These holidays are analyzed according to different criteria. Some scientists subdivide them on the base of emotional loading, like jolly and sad holidays; others divide them as religious and non-religious; the third use the following criteria: a holiday is based on some recollection, commemoration of some event in the past (*Army Day*, *Independence Day*);

- solemn beginning of some period of time (*New Year's Day*; *the 1st of September*)

- solemn ending of some period of time (*Victory Day/Memorial Day*) (Bortnikova, 2012, p. 222).

In our opinion, the holidays of Danubian Bessarabia should be analyzed according to their relation to state, religious and ethnic/folk characteristics. Danubian Bessarabia is multi-faced and bright. Here as if a kaleidoscope, we see people's traditions and experience of more than 130 nationalities, life and culture of different historical epochs, religious beliefs and even languages.

Among the folk celebrations we should mention a week-long event called *Maslenitsa*. The name *Maslenitsa* comes from the word butter (oil). The word originally sounded like "*mazalo*", in the meaning what was smeared on a pancake. "*Mazalo*" was a symbol of wealth, and manifested a new rich and nourishing year.

A celebration differs from a holiday due to its duration and numerous traditions observed. It is usually noted by travelling choirs dressed in traditional costumes (Bulgarian, Romanian, Gagauz, Greek, Ukrainian) and various folk games including tug-of-war, stilt-walking and pillow-fighting. A traditional game often involves men climbing a 40-50 foot wooden pole in only their underwear. Snowball fights are very common throughout a winter event. All people have pancakes of all kinds, which symbolize the sun, future springtime and are the main symbols of *Maslenitsa*. Though many cultures change under the influence of globalization, this celebration has preserved its traditions. It appeared more than a thousand years ago as a pagan holiday. One of its traditions is visiting friends and relatives. The other obligatory feature of the celebration is the presence of mummers and clowns. Sometimes people organize fistfights. The main *Maslenitsa* ritual is the burning of effigies, which symbolizes the departure of the boring winter and meeting the spring.

Maslenitsa day shave their own names. Monday is known as *Meeting*, when people gather together outside and have fun; Tuesday – "*zaigrysh*", on this day people have to make a snow man and play snowballs, or play different outdoor games; Wednesday – "*gourmand*" is a day for those who are fond of traditional holiday meals; Thursday – "*walking day*" makes it possible to meet people both relatives and friends; Friday – "*mother-in-law's evenings*" is the day to visit close relatives including the mother-in-law; Saturday – "*sister-in-law's gatherings*" is the day when unmarried girls and men, have parties; Sunday – "*Forgiveness Sunday*" is the day when people forgive each other and ask for mercy. As we see, the main word *Maslenitsa* unites such notions as *family, relatives, joy, cuisine, games* that reflect the idea of happiness and wealth based on family relations.

Folk traditions are differently embodied in mass festivals and celebrations. The end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI century is marked by a crisis in the culture of celebrations which led to the search of new ways of holiday making. One of the main holiday functions was given to entertaining. The search for social orientations in holiday culture raised interest in folk traditions and aesthetic sources.

Many holidays acquired bright theatrical colouring. Modern mass celebrations unite such features, as: traditional and collaborative character, variability, originality, improvisation, programming of active audience's participation, use of costumes.

The first day of spring in the Danubian Bessarabia is famous for the celebration of *Mertsishor* (Мэрдцишор). This beautiful celebration is traditional for The Moldavian villages of Izmail and Reni regions. It is usually celebrated from the 1st and up to the 12th of March. This tradition has been honored for many years among the scholars and teachers of Izmail State University for Humanities. These days various music festivals and fairs are held. The main tradition during the *Mertsishor* is to give each other amulets, called – “*mertsishors*” composed of two small flowers of red and white color, which are attached to the clothes. This beautiful tradition is based on a legend. According to it, on the first day of March a beautiful Spring-girl came to the edge of the forest and saw a primrose in the thorns of a blackthorn. Trying to help the flower she began to clear the land around, freeing it from the prickly branches. The aunt-Winter, having seen that, got very angry and started waving her hands, asking the cold wind and snow to destroy the primrose. Trying to defend the flower the Spring-girl bent down, covered the weak sprout with her hands and got pricked with the blackthorn. A drop of hot blood fell down from the wounded hand and the flower came to life.

Bessarabian Bulgarians of the region honor the first spring holiday, which they call *Martenitca*. Its traditions are similar to the *Mertsishor* celebrations. Bulgarian amulets are called *Marteniyca*, and also have two colours: the red color, which symbolizes the feminine principle, motherhood and health, and the white colour that stands for the male principle and strength. In addition, the white color is treated as the symbol of chastity, spring freshness and purity.

Both *Martenitca* and *Mertsishor* symbolize the victory of good over evil. Thus, the beginning of spring is associated with the revival of life.

Another famous celebration is known as the *Bessarabian Bulgarians Day*. According to statistics, every 3rd citizen of Odessa and Odessa region is a representative of the Bessarabian Diaspora, and this includes a huge force, unity and spirit of the Bulgarian people. It should also be noted that the Bulgarian Diaspora in Ukraine is the largest in the world. During the holiday the Bulgarian people are dressed in their national costumes, sing folk songs, dance and are a picture of hospitality. The halls are usually decorated with national symbols, the guests' tables are filled with Bulgarian treats and Bulgarian wine. The holiday shows that the Bulgarian Diaspora is really characterized by solidarity, unity and positive emotional impulses, which it tries to carry through generations.

One of the traditional and favoured art festivals is called the *Danube Spring*. This celebration takes place in Izmail and attracts thousands of people. It includes exhibitions of masters of arts and crafts that are usually held in the Alley of

Friendship. Any favorite exhibit may be purchased as a souvenir in memory of the festival. There are many portable trade and exit cafes where you can taste various sweets, pastries, kebabs and other national food. Along the alley the authorities organize the work of all kinds of attractions for children and grown-ups. The gala concert of the festival unites the city artists, creative teams and bands, who perform their best. The abundance of music and dance styles, bright colorful costumes could satisfy the tastes of viewers of all generations. The main symbols of the holiday are friendship and peace.

In autumn, on the 13th of November, people celebrate an annual festival, known as “*National ceremonies, peculiarities of national cuisine and wines of Bessarabia*”. This is an incomparable action: a riot of colors and national costumes, elegance of traditional rituals, smells and taste of dishes of cuisine of all nationalities of the region, a unique bouquet and aroma of our wines, dances, songs, and theatrical performances. At the same time the concert program includes wine tasting, presented to the Commission without specifying the names of winemakers - only under the numbers (for the purity of the experiment), and the tables are covered with dishes of national cuisine of Southern Bessarabian villages. The local cuisine, which has absorbed the originality of Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Greek and Gypsy dishes will delight you with home-made bread, fish soup, Mamalyga, pork rinds, cheese, stewed fruit, dumplings, lentils, bacon, sausages, potato stew, pickles, fried fish, salads, pancakes - and other national dishes.

In the Southern Bessarabia we may mention one more type of holiday days, the naming of which is tied to some working profession. For example: *Teacher's Day*, celebrated on the first Sunday in October; *Navy Day*, celebrated on the 31st of July; *Student Day*, closely connected with the other holiday *St. Tatiana Day*, both celebrated on the 25th of January; *All-Ukrainian day of culture workers*, celebrated on the 25th of March; *Science day*, celebrated on the third Saturday of May; *Border guard day*, celebrated on the 29th of May. These holidays are celebrated by the people, who have some relation to different fields of professional activity.

In conclusion, we should say that holidays, celebrations and festivals of Southern Bessarabia may be subdivided into such big groups: religious holidays of national and international character, state all-Ukrainian holidays, Southern Bessarabian folk holidays and celebrations that stress ethnic specificity of the region, Southern Danubian festivals, which reflect national traditions and cultural variety of the region, and professional holidays that aim to distinguish and congratulate people of different professions. The investigation of holidays, celebrations and festivals should be provided on the borderline of historic sciences and linguo-culturology in order to embrace all the layers related to the phenomenon.

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