

## How Can Languages become Victims of Xenophobia?

Irina POP

**Abstract.** The scientific purpose of this study is a theoretical one: to propose a concept for a harmful phenomenon, xenophobia upon certain languages, a phenomenon that passes unnoticed, without a proper tool to see and to address it. As consequence, it will be a paper meant to coin and illustrate a concept on xenophobia upon certain languages and to focus on the xenophobia on the languages labeled in the public sphere as “the strange languages”. To construct the concept, it is to discriminate among the strangers’ languages and “strange languages”. (The notion of xenophobia is taken in its simplest meaning: phobia applied to strangers.) The very point of the paper is that certain languages are victims of xenophobia just because they are labeled as strange, connected with those people that are imagined strangers and marginal at the same time. (The word imagined is taken in the Benedict Anderson way.<sup>1</sup>The concept of xenophobia upon the languages is composed by I. the de facto xenophobia upon languages; and, II. by the xenophobia upon those language speakers. The concept, of de facto xenophobia upon languages, is coined in five major dimensions. Namely the: 1. socio-politically ignoring them as valuable means of communication or cultural expression; 2. de-valORIZING and despising and stigmatizing some languages as languages of the immoral and dangerous strangers; 3. discouraging the targeted languages’ development; (by not considering those languages’ use in administration, in the justice system, in education even in the healthcare system, and neither is the country’s culture, religious life, or social life); 4. forbidding them normatively – in law, an explicit and public executive decision or on another legal formula; 5. denying the existence of the elements of xenophobia in these languages. The socio-cultural purposes of the article are to contribute to the xenophobia identification in the socio-cultural life where it is unnoticed yet and, mainly, to face it.

**Keywords:** *strange languages, foreign languages, and xenophobia toward certain languages*

### Introduction

The question that this paper is trying to answer is: How could we notice phenomena as xenophobia upon certain languages, a phenomenon that produces xenophobic effects and nurtures the spiral of xenophobia? How could it be

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<sup>1</sup> B. Anderson, (1991): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, [consulted version *Comunități imaginare: Reflecții asupra originii și răspândirii naționalismului*, versiune în limba română Roxana Oltean și Ioana Potrache, Bucuresti, Editura Integral].

conceptualized and faced? The universe of the study is concomitantly theoretical – and, in this respect, it addressed the philosophical literature and its communication – and empirical. The empirical part it is focusing on the situation of the Romani language in Europe and specifically in Romania, in history, and nowadays. Nevertheless, in many parts of the paper, it is trying to overpass the borders and to compare the condition of Romani with other languages or with the languages directly related to Romani, languages spoken outside of Europe.

The purposes of the study are mainly theoretical: to propose a concept for a harmful phenomenon, xenophobia upon certain languages, a phenomenon that passed unnoticed, and continued to remain unnoticed without a proper tool to see and to address it; to raise the question of how the xenophobia upon languages leads to the xenophobia of the languages' speakers, and to try to hierarchize the forms of xenophobia upon languages.

The methods used are those of the constructing of a concept, namely, attempts to construct a theory as a conception on the phenomena targeted; to double-checking any identified form of its manifestations by using the data of the empirical studies and personal experiences; and, finally, to propose a concept, as a concentrate of the conception, a definition.

The resources, for the attempt to suggest a concept on xenophobia, are some ideas and discussions on xenophobia, philosophically, politically, and legally explored; some knowledge upon the linguistic and social condition of the Romani language across Europe, issued by prestigious researchers in linguistic, socio-linguistic, sociology, education, and Roma's anthropology; personal field research on how the Romani is seen by the Others<sup>2</sup>.

The paper structure is composed of three parts. The first part is trying to clarify the main notions involved: strangers' language, strange languages. It emphasizes the notion of the stranger, the notion which generates the very content of the notions as strangers' language and strange languages. It operates with the notion strangers' language is different from that the strange languages. The strange languages, as subcategories of strangers' languages, constitute the notion that describes how the languages of the most marginalized peoples appear to us. Their languages are regularly xenophobically treated.

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<sup>2</sup> The words involved in defining the basic relation We-Others in the society are written with a capital letter, just to indicate their role in establishing what becomes strange for, and in a concrete society.

In part two, the forms of xenophobia upon the strange languages are defined and detailed as contents and placed in a certain hierarchy as forms.

In part three, it is open the question of whether the xenophobia upon the marginalized peoples determines the xenophobia upon their languages, or reversely, the xenophobia upon languages leads to the xenophobia toward the speakers of those languages.

The estimated results of our demarche are a proposed definition of the phenomenon inventoried, namely the xenophobia upon certain languages; a description of its faces, and phases; and a view on its social functions and effects.

The discussions that we left open are connected with two issues: 1) the universe of conception xenophobia upon the certain languages, how large it has to be; and 2) with the crossing point where the concept could discriminate between the reality and the forged, false and fanatic claims that xenophobia is arising and is destroying the accomplishments of the victims or even, innocent persons.

The phenomenon of xenophobia upon certain languages is intricate with the xenophobia against the speakers of those languages. The question is, "Whether, or not the concept of xenophobia upon the languages should include the xenophobia against the speakers of those languages or, it is an independent and new phenomenon?"

We opt for an inclusive vision. That is, we see xenophobia over certain languages as a phenomenon composed of de facto xenophobia over languages and xenophobia against speakers of those languages.

## **A Concept of Xenophobia against the Languages: A Defining Attempt**

### **1. "Strange languages" and xenophobia: an inseparable relation**

#### **1.1 A notion of the "strange language": a proposal**

From Our point of view, "the strange languages" are those languages, spoken in Our proximity, but completely ignored and misjudged as ignorable by Us. Consequently, they are labeled, as poor, un-valuable, minor, and less than minor. In some cases, they are labeled as dangerous for Us. Convinced (?!) by their malicious presence, We prepared their and their speakers' oppressions. It can be said that, We have "imagined" these languages as perilous and that We are the ones who treat these languages as dangerous; that, their danger is the result of our projections.

The most prominent feature of these languages is they are prone to be

victims of Our xenophobia. They are the languages of those who fear Us and whom We also fear. These are the languages spoken by those to whom We have developed phobias and despise.

It is to be underlined, that “the strange languages” is a sub-category that exists only from Our point of view. It is an imagined (by Us) category. (For their speakers, they are their identifiers, languages to which they attach total subjective value and total effectiveness.)

The most common examples of “strange languages” in Europe are the Romani languages. These languages were historically many times victims of the political banning, of their speakers’ identification as criminal, spies and, professional traitors, the identifications that resulted in public executions.

The roots of “the strange languages” rejections and xenophobia are in the traditional ways of treating them, in the political manipulations, in our limited interest (and, possibly in our limited ability?) to learn them, and in our political interest in easing our social competition.

"Strange languages", as a formula derived from the formula "foreign languages/ strangers’ languages". The table before tries to indicate “the strange languages” rank in a general table of languages seen from the points of view of their social effectiveness and of the subjective values that We attach to them.

**Figure 1. The Languages Nature and Their Social Effectiveness and Subjective Value that We Attach to Them**

	NATURE OF THE LANGUAGES FOR US	THE LARGER CATEGORIES OF LANGUAGES	The sub-categories of languages	The social effectiveness & the subjective value that We attached to it
1	MOTHER TONGUE	Mother tongue	Mother tongue as an official language	Total effectiveness Total value
		OTHERS	Adoptive languages Language of our education, official language, or the majority language	Major effectiveness Limited subjective value
2	Foreign languages (STRANGERS’ LANGUAGES)	Others’ languages (Others’ mother tongue)	Languages of the larger groups that we do not learn Languages of the Other, that we	No effectiveness Limited value

			<p>learned a foreign language in education</p> <p>Minorities and regional languages <i>per se</i> unlearned by Us</p> <p>Minorities and regional languages that we acquired</p> <p>Strange languages, that We ignore</p>	<p>Gradual effectiveness</p> <p>Gradual subjective value</p> <p>No effectiveness</p> <p>No value</p> <p>Gradual effectiveness</p> <p>Minor value</p> <p>No effectiveness</p> <p>No values</p>
3	Sacred languages	Liturgical	<p>Latin and Slavonic in Christianity</p> <p>Avestan in Classical Zoroastrianism</p> <p>Hebrew for Mosaics</p> <p>Arabic in Islamism</p>	Out of the subjective scaling
		Secret and sophisticated languages	<p>Sanskrit</p> <p>Cabalistic</p>	Out of the subjective scaling
4	Lingua franca	Invented but failed Imposed via industrial and trade progress, culture, civilization, religion	<p>Esperanto, International English in the North Atlantic Space and Australia i.e.</p>	<p>Major effectiveness</p> <p>Major value</p>

As it results from the table, “the strange languages” are only a sub-group of the minorities’ languages, the sub-group of languages with the lower rank. Concerning the "strangers' languages", “the strange languages” are again the languages of the lower status among the languages categories, and the languages of the group of the most deprived minorities.

“The strange languages” must not be confused with the languages that became victims of xenophobia because of their status of languages of the oppressors. (They got more features than being victims of xenophobia.) The xenophobia upon the languages of oppressors is rooted in the reality of oppression and it is a mobilizing factor for the rebellion to it.

In Romania, the popular Romanian language frequently uses the question: “What do you not understand? Are you a Turk?”

The saying's meaning is profound. The language of the one who dominates you has no openness to understand you, to accept empathy for you. This sense creates space for a nuance of the concept of xenophobia in foreign languages, not strange languages.

Again, the xenophobia upon the languages of those who dominate Us, is a different thing. It projects the revolt and mobilization against the oppressor over the language of domination. In ways that are not rational but emotional, the languages of domination create also hatred, phobias, rejections.

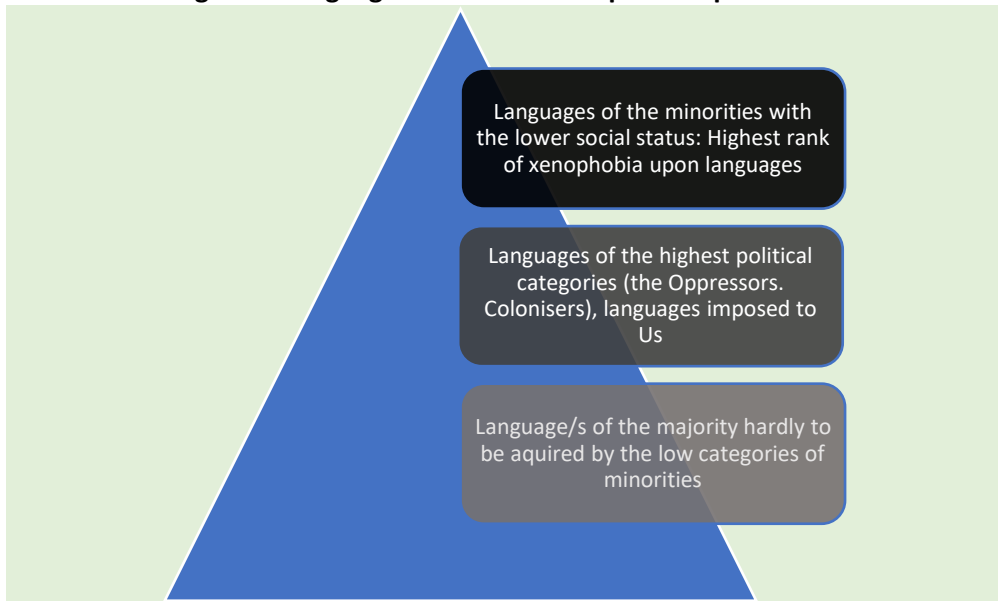
The Russian being language of the dominant nation in the communist bloc has generated mass phobia. Like any language of the violent oppressor, it created a silent revolt and complex phobias. Being imposed as the first foreign language in any curriculum, even in independent states without roots or Slavic population (Hungary, Romania), it was associated with feelings that we cannot propel ourselves socially without this language, and the level of proficiency in Russian determine the chances of personal development. But with the feeling of conditioning the social rise of the Russian language, a stronger feeling was created that it should be bypassed as a language not only oppressive but downright concentrating space (prison space). The political motivation for imposing the language (that this is the language of peace and friendship between peoples) was - in Romania, at least - never believed or appropriated. It was hatred. The proof is that intellectuals who have studied Russian for 8 years in schools can barely read Russian. The phobia of language did not spread to the great Russian culture. Dostoevsky remained the great formative reading for the intellectuals of those times.

Nobody dares to say: it is "strange language".

In brief, a "strange language" is a language that we hear frequently, but which we do not listen to, that we ignore! That we label as poor, un-valuable, contemptible. In some cases, we claim it is dangerous to Us and it must be chased and extinct.

### *1.2 Xenophobia against "the strange languages" in the insane societies*

In a society hit by xenophobia upon "the strange languages", the xenophobia bursts in degrees as those suggested in the Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Languages Status and Xenophobia upon Them**

The social effects of xenophobia upon "the strange languages" are complex and dependent on society's wisdom. By focusing on the challenges that "the strange languages" brought to the sick societies, they miss all the possible benefits mentioned above and fuels new xenophobia against themselves.

By contrary, in any sane – the sane being taken in the Fromm terms - society, the new languages are seen as new opportunities opened to develop trade relations; to benefits from the experiences treasured in the languages of new people and cultures; to embrace new perspectives in addressed old challenges. (The sophisticate societies explicitly look after exotic languages – the languages' orchids as they were seen in the ninetieth century - as ways to enlarge the access the humanity heritage.)

Focusing on the challenges that "the strange languages" brought to the sick societies, they miss all the possible benefits mentioned above and fuels new xenophobia against themselves.

The languages of a new majority unexpectedly imposed to the general society, to the marginal groups of the previous majority, and to the old generations too, generate and nurture xenophobia against the new dominant language.

"The strange languages" are prone to be the first victims of Our worst xenophobia against certain languages. A vicious circle of xenophobia, upon "the

strange languages”, emerges in any traumatized society: their features of being strange – see above – sentences them of being xenophobically treated, and the xenophobia upon them adds new negative characteristics to these languages. Such a circle becomes a structural element in the xenophobia spiral that characterizes any traumatized society – sick society, as Fromm<sup>3</sup> named them.

Considering the spiral of xenophobia in a country, it is to see, that it is composed simultaneously by circles difficult to be broken, as elements that mutually nurture their developments.

Our xenophobia calls their xenophobia; the xenophobia against people speakers of certain languages calls the xenophobia against their languages; Our expansion of the xenophobia against Them results in Their xenophobia against Us, i.e. That is, the victims of xenophobia develop responses to Our phobia and despise: their hates, phobias and despise. That is why to impulse xenophobia in a vulnerable society is not a complicated job. Any extremist party succeed it now and succeeded in history.

In the linguistic field, the victims of xenophobia due to their condition of dependence on the competencies in the country's languages, develop a wise approach. In contrast with Our linguistic phobias, which result in No attempts to pick up some formula in the targeted languages, the speakers of “the strange languages” developed strategies of learning as well as they can, and as rapidly as possible Our languages. Unfortunately, their achievements do not reduce the xenophobia against them. Unfortunately, again, Our attempts to decrease xenophobia in society, do not automatically result in a competition of reducing it among all the social groups. The descending spiral is more complicated to understand and supported. (Sometimes it could be misinterpreted as an act of national betrayal to the Strangers, as it is already done among the Extremists European parties.)

A new distinctive feature of xenophobia against “the strange languages” when we look to them as secret languages. From this point of view, “the strange languages” must be seen as secret and common languages. The distinction imposes to take into account new nuances in xenophobia, as the xenophobia against the secret languages.

The xenophobia against the secret languages is intensively aggressive

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<sup>3</sup> E. Fromm, (1955): *The Sane Society* <https://fromm-online.org/en/>). Version consulted in the Romanian language *Societatea bolnavă* în Fromm, *Texte Alese*, selection and interpretation by Nicolae Frigiou, București, Editura Politică, 1983.



because they are automatically interpreted as the languages of criminals and spies. It increases just because they are secret, and kept secret for the outsiders. Nevertheless, there are among the secret languages, the professional languages. There is their function in their social group to be used secretly and it is simply to see the reason behind the social norm. The market for services provided by the professions transmitted by secret languages is extremely narrow. To keep it in the benefit of the origin group, it is to keep the language of transmission in secrecy.

In some cases, among the Roma peoples, the training in these languages is reserved exclusively for the "gifted" members of the group, those selected to be the group initiates. The motifs of secrecy are social: they are languages that transmit inter-generationally the professional secrets, the ways of earning their living. They are the languages of the fortune-tellers, of the human healers or the animal healers, of those specialized in pharmaceutical virtues of some herbs, contains the thesaurus which conditions their professions, and, their earnings.

There is also true, that the criminals developed their secret languages and that they know very well that their mastering ensures "professional" effectiveness. Their secrecy is dangerous. Because the thieves and criminal got also have their secret languages, all the secret languages are stigmatized and demonized as dangerous to Us.

Fraçoise Thom underlined a new feature of the secret languages developed in the concentrating/prisons' space, in post-communist Russia. The secret languages vocabulary invades the languages of the Russian new elites. Even President Putin used expressions with such roots<sup>4</sup>. For professor Thom, it is a sign of the social alliances between the new political elites and prisons' elites. She did not suggest that the public xenophobia against the secret languages decreased with such alliances.

In Europe, regularly, the speakers of "the strange languages" are the multilingual marginals<sup>5</sup>\*. They speak fluently the languages of their life's contexts, too. The features – largely unnoticed publicly – do not lead to "the strange languages" xenophobia decreasing. As common (non-secret) languages, the Romani

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<sup>4</sup> F. Thom, (2018): *Comprendre le poutinisme*, Romanian version *Putin și putinismul* by Adina Arvatu, București, Editura Humanitas, 2020, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> L. Pop, (2018): *Marginal Multilingualism as the Roma People Identity*, Publication in the journal JIMS (Journal of Identity and Migration Issues/ Oradea, Romania), [http://www.e-migration.ro/jims/Vol12.No1\\_2018](http://www.e-migration.ro/jims/Vol12.No1_2018). pp. 1-35.

languages and others similar with them, are open, even inviting to be learned by the outsiders and could not be, rationally, blamed as carriers of secrets and threats dangerous for Us. (Nevertheless, they are blamed. It is because irrational and emotional mechanisms imagine the languages that we do not know as dangerous and threatening.) As common (non-secret) languages, they are open, even inviting to be learned by the outsiders and could not be, rationally, blamed as carriers of secrets and threats dangerous for Us. (But they still are because irrational and emotional mechanisms imagine them as dangerous and threatening.)

As common (non-secret) languages, “the strange languages” are doubly stigmatized. Firstly, they are de-valorized and defamed, by Us, as the languages of the marginals and humble groups, of the groups that, in Our opinion, did not create universally significant and valuable cultures, knowledge, or wisdom. (The entire defamation’ process is deployed without a serious study of those cultures.) Aceste limbi nu ar trebui ignorate tocmai pentru că nu știm ce experiențe și înțelepciune valoroase pentru omenire conțin ele.) Secondly, they are demonized as languages of the strangers that carry up perils to Us, Our possessions, and civilization. The strangers nearby Us embodied all the phobias related to Our fears – experienced or imagined toward – all the strange enemies that we meet in Our history and life. (The experiences with friendly people are obscured in the process.) In Our imagination, any strangers’ group is planning to destroy Us, directly or indirectly. In Our imagination, their plans of destroying Us are conceived, shared, and instructed using “the strange languages”. That is why politically their languages must be put out of the capacity to work. It is on this base, that some “strange languages” were culturally pushed into decline, by ignoring and despising *ab initio* their products; they were socially marginalized and blamed, by claiming that they did not accomplish written products and universally important works of art, of science, or wisdom. In some cases, based on the prejudice that “strange languages” are dangerous *per se* they were forbidden, in European history. It is on such a basis, that the use of strangers’ languages too became a crime.

“The strange languages” are also xenophobically targeted as foreign languages, the language unfamiliar to us and creators in Our proximity of the skype-sounds<sup>6</sup> that We do not understand, and that afraid Us. They appear as the rapist of Our comfort at Our homes. They are associated – correctly or many times incorrectly

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<sup>6</sup> It refers to a *sounding milieu* that just hearing it... makes Us feeling terrified. (i.e. Allāhu ‘akbar!)

– with the terrorist attacks.

## **2. Xenophobia against certain languages**

### **2.1 The nature of the xenophobia upon languages**

Instinctively and pragmatically the people look for the speakers of their language or the people speaking languages familiar to them. It is to get the comfort of being understood and to understand, to get assistance and security. Reversely, they avoid people speaking unfamiliar languages and sometimes misinterpret their intentions. The new sounds, their intensity, accents, body language, the intonation's style, the entire skype-sounds generate insecurity. The newly arrived non-speakers of the lingua loci get anxious too. They are afraid of the intentions and the possible reactions against them.

An experience in Beijing of two Romanian tourists is illustrating the phenomenon. In the attempt to visit the Forbidden Palace, they bought the wrong tickets. When they arrived at the checkpoint for the tickets they were turned out. An explanation was done in Chinese and the gesture “Not for you!” did not appease them. On the contrary, they got anxious and trying to escape from the noisy crowd they perceived as hostile. A lot of Chinese around competed to assist them and to immediately change the wrong tickets. Unfortunately, they did not understand the intentions and got more afraid. The voices of the voluntary helpers got strongest and strongest and their group enlarged, they explained – in Chinese – and gesticulated more and more. The panic of the two increased and disparately looking for someone able to speak a European language. It happened quite soon. At a moment, a group of Europeans arrived to visit the Palace and brought the security for the two. The group guide explained to them about the wrong tickets and the goodwill of the people around them.

The example shows how unfamiliar languages stress us, and how the familiar ones provide comfort. Psychologically, it explains why we joint happily the speakers of Our language or a language familiar to Us; and, practically, it proves how efficient is to manage in a familiar language.

In their avoidance of unfamiliar languages, some people step outside of the tolerable reactions to something unfamiliar. They act against the unfamiliar language. They transform their unspecific emotions to unknown languages into fears and phobias and objectify such languages as “strange languages”. Even worse, they impose their attitude into a model of behavior. Further, they socially communicate – with political or other kinds of social support – their approach, triggering and



maintaining a spiral of xenophobia inside the larger process. Successfully communicating their attitude, they objectify the targeted languages as “strange languages”, languages designed to be xenophobically treated, in some spots. They also legitimate their hostile attitude toward certain languages and to their speakers in public discourses.

In brief, it is to conclude that by nature, the xenophobia upon languages is emotional (not rational), and the acts that it inspires are beyond the tolerable limits that characterize civilized society.

## 2.2 *The dimensions of the xenophobia upon certain languages*

The xenophobic attitudes on “the strange languages” are about:

1. ignoring – politically, socially, or individually - certain language’s very existence or, ignoring them as valuable means of communication and cultural expression of the Other peoples;

2. de-valorizing and despising – in indirect attitudes and in public reference, reports - certain languages as primitive, undeveloped, poor or, even denning their quality of languages (labeling them as sub-dialects or as a kind of parlance associated with antisocial activity) and stigmatizing some languages as languages of the dangerous strangers;

3. directly and indirectly discouraging the targeted languages’ development (not considering those languages’ official use in administration, in the justice system, in education even in the healthcare system, and not considering those languages’ use in the country’s culture, religious life), and letting room for them only in the family’s area, that is to transform them in the “kitchen languages”

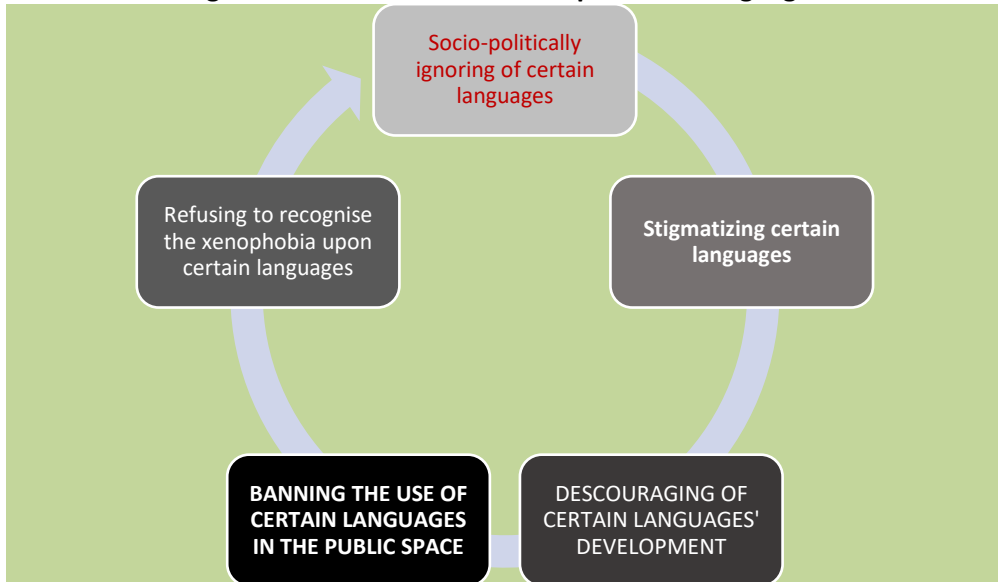
4. normatively forbidding the native speakers to use those languages into the public space (That is to condemn them into total extinction by cutting current use and by actively destroying their written memory, *de facto* “erasing”, in concrete political actions<sup>7</sup>, the social memory consigned in these languages.);

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<sup>7</sup> In the Serbian Banat, the Romanian names written down (in Latin alphabet) on the cross in the cemeteries, were curved out and replaced with Serbianized ones, written down in the Cyrillic alphabet. In Transylvania, the Romanian names were translated into Hungarian according to an official Guide issued for the administrative bodies. (The case is interpretable. It can be seen as a xenophobic act – in a Hungarian historical policy of assimilation – where all the names are translated into the Hungarian language and pronounced according to the Hungarian phonetic. It can be seen simply as a Hungarian habit, free from political connotations.)

5. denying the existence of the elements of xenophobia upon these languages and public protests against “the tempers” of those that present factual arguments on this.

**Figure 3. Dimensions of the xenophobia on languages**



## **2.2 Detailing the contents of the five dimensions of xenophobia in certain languages**

### **2.2.1 On the social ignoring of the certain languages**

The element of politico-social ignoring in xenophobia against certain languages is referring to the social, political, and cultural attitudes of No noticing those languages' existence<sup>8</sup> in Our proximity; to the lack of awareness that some groups of citizens speak among them specific languages. Indeed, among the general public, some languages' sounds and words are factually unnamed and labeled as strange and out of Our interests. The names, area of speaking, their origins, history,

The changing toponyms with the political dominant ethnicity' language is also an interpretable case.

<sup>8</sup> In research done in 2016, among the students in different Universities in Oradea, a city where more than 5% of people speak Romani, only one single person recognized the Romany language in a text of 500 words. L. Pop, (2015): *Students Perception on Rroma in Romania* in "Central European Political Science Review", no. 61/2015. pp. 94-114 [www.ce.polity.hu](http://www.ce.polity.hu)



influence on other languages, or their major accomplishments are out of Our interest and unknown to Us. That happens even in the areas where these languages are practiced. The social ignorance of certain languages leads to take as natural their denying as valuable means of communication or cultural expression.

The causes of “the strange languages” ignoring are the “classical ones”. The first is No viewing their social utility. (In a deeper analysis it reveals to be the result of the established social practice and “social lessons” learned in Our societies.) The second seems to be No cultural movement to change such perception. Concretely, the observable causes are a) the practices of the native speakers to avoid their mother tongues in their interrelations with the Others; b) no substantial efforts to speak, teach or write on those languages’ existence to the public at large; c) No attempts to awake the interests to propose policies to dissipate the ignorance; d) and the very social attitude to encourage the speakers to hide their mother tongues.

In brief, ignoring certain languages is to treat the targeted languages as non-existent in Our “civilized public sphere” and, to admit their functioning only in the private life of their traditional speakers.

The scientific interest of some scholars for such languages – when they are regarded as exotic phenomena and not as social facts of depriving – is no a counterargument to the social ignoring as the major phenomenon. Similarly, the genuine fact of languages dynamic, which involve some language-internal collapse caused by the speakers’ disappearance is not to be confused with the pressure for the social ignorance as a projected disappearance, when the speakers are active and the language plays groups functions. (See more in the article on the *Romani languages xenophobia*.)

### 2.2.2 On the public de-valorization, discrediting and stigmatizing some languages

The processes of de-valorization of certain languages consist in labeling them as undeveloped, poor, unable to express complex theories, ideas, concepts, feelings, emotions, abilities, competencies, and so on. The missing logic of such processes was unveiled in the XV century, when the excellent linguist Cristophoro Landino - expressing his support for the vernacular languages (Italian of Tuscany) and his rebellion against the arrogance of the scholars trained in the classic languages – Greek, Hebrew, and Latin – wrote: “*There are not languages unable to host sophisticate ideas, there are only languages in which such sophistication is not used yet.*”

The discrediting occurs in multiple forms, out of which, the following two are defining: 1) the spreading and the perpetuation of the idea that those languages are primitive and poor; and, 2) that they are languages un-useful for the speakers' social inclusion or their emancipatory process.

What about stigmatizing process? A short incursion in the stigma' deciphering – as it was done by its classical monographer, Erving Goffman, in his *Stigma*<sup>9</sup> – shall mediate a fair understanding of the reality of stigmatization in certain languages. According to Goffman, people with a bad moral record are stigmatized, in an etymologic sense of the word, marked with a sign. A stigma – a special sign on someone - is a sign of bad morally and an alert to Us to avoid stigmatized persons. It is also an alert to not touch stigmatized things because they are dangerous to Us.

Who are the stigmatized persons and groups? The stigma is about the individual/s' or groups' condition, groups who are disqualified from full social acceptance because they are socially viewed as deviant, frightening, un-moral, or weak. Goffman discriminated among three types of stigma body abominations; blemishes of individual behaviors and stigma on certain racial, religious and ethnic groups. For our research interest, the stigma on some groups is to be detailed. Among the disqualified (from an equal social condition) groups, there are disaffiliated and limitedly accepted. They are the social deviants as "... the prostitutes, drug addicts, delinquents, criminals, jazz musicians, bohemians, gypsies, carnival workers, hobos, show people, full-time gamblers, beach dwellers, homosexuals, and the urban unrepentant poor".<sup>10</sup> In the continuity of Goffman considerations, it is to add that the stigma automatically applies to the roots and the accomplishments of stigmatized individuals or groups<sup>11</sup>, and firstly, to their language<sup>12</sup> as part of group identity and its major accomplishment.

The book does not analyze specifically the stigma on strangers as individuals or groups or on their languages. But the book spirit and its' logic let us add to the

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<sup>9</sup> The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor — a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places." Goffman, (1963): *Stigma*, p.11.

<sup>10</sup> E. Goffman, (1963): *Stigma*, p.118.

<sup>11</sup> The artifacts, the cultural products, or social results of certain stigmatized groups become stigmatized too.

<sup>12</sup> Reversely, there are cases of the overrated some strangers' languages with the consequence of self-stigmatization of Our mother tongue.

very idea of the stigma's meaning (disqualification from full social acceptance) some notes important in our research:

a) the stigma is more simply applied to the strangers because they lack the strong institutions to defend them; because it is historically practiced and motivated; because it fills instantly the gap of Our ignorance on them with a familiar label; and because it disqualifies them in the social competition and it is easing Our progress;

b) the stigma on the strangers' languages – as languages unknown to Us – is the first step in a process of disqualifying them in the social competition and in easing our progress;

c) the process of stigmatizing the strangers' languages ends up in labeling the strangers' languages into "strange languages"; of the people similar to the social deviants.

The stigmatization of certain languages as disqualification from social acceptance is associated with the social processes of defamation and discrediting. All the three results into systematic defamations materialized in the claims that the targeted languages are used only for criminal purposes by the anti-social groups of beggars, thieves, criminals, people in the prisons. (In a distorting confusion, the defamers claim that slangs as the Cant or other similar with it are identical with the Romani languages. The reality is that the mentioned slang is not connected to the Romani more than to the other languages. Sometimes, some slang is composed of common contributions of the Romani and Other languages. The Cant is a slang composed by words in the Romani and English; Rotwelsch is a slang that resulted in the same process but adding German words too.

There are also slang apart from the Romani languages. Among the anti-social groups, there are argots that do not involve words in Romani at all; similarly, among the medical doctors, or scientists there are professional argots independent from Romani. That is why the Romani languages must not be confused with slang. Like any other language, it admits the sociolects, including the slang of the antisocial group; but the sociolects are different from the Romany languages.)

Similarly, the targeted languages are xenophobically considered as languages of the spies, used by the spies against our security. There is no logic in the xenophobic construction. To learn about our vulnerabilities and about our secrets the strangers need to speak Our languages, not to practice a language which we see as an enemy; need to be multilingual and to access a secure channel of communication, not to parade a language upon We developed multiple suspicions.



In brief, slang is a general linguistic phenomenon, a general sociolect in a specific group. The slang of the anti-social group is also general. The very existence of slang is not much related to the Romani language than it is to any other language out the around 6 000 spoken on the Earth.

### *2.2.3 On the public discouragement of certain language use and development*

The society at large, and political decisions' takers, directly and indirectly, discourage the targeted languages' development – they do not consider these languages' official use in administration, in the justice system, in education, in the healthcare system and do not consider these languages' use in the country's culture, religious life;

Together, the stigmatization and discouraging of the targeted languages have multiple outcomes. On the first plan, the outcomes could be analyzed at the society as such, on these language fate, on their speakers' chances to develop their natural potential. At the socio-political level of the society, they get the "statute" of the non-existing languages or shadow languages. It affects the administrative, juridical, political, media, cultural, religious, educational space. In such conditions, they do not keep pace with the life in the mentioned areas and they become outdated out of the mutual interchange with other languages, out of the impulse to develop and pushed to implosions. Factually, step by step these languages become "kitchen languages". What happens, during the lives of the first two generations that face the conditions of letting out of the social use? (The alternative of the speakers is to move to more tolerant spaces.) The children that are native speakers of these languages are disadvantaged in the education system. They are those that fail, early abandon the school, and become the functional illiterate or functional interlopes, providing training and jobs for new generations of linguistically disadvantaged pupils. On the second plan, the analysis reveals that the social outcomes of the stigmatization and the discouraging of the languages considered strange model the general public mentalities and the related public policies. They generate the general public acceptance that these languages' disdain and their humiliation are natural. The acceptance embraces forms as a) the general society doubting targeted language's capabilities to provide regular support for a complex communication (the written and standardized communication); b) denying these languages structures and driven factors' force to aggregate in one single and enduring language able to become the very umbrella of the Roma general political and cultural identity; c)

contestation of their capabilities to express interhuman abstract or symbolic communication; d) refusing to accept these languages potential to accomplish a cultural level able to offer universal meanings and values for the humanity as a whole. The public acceptance of the humiliation of these languages, leads to the targeted language collapses, even among the descendants of the native speakers. (to the language's extinction.) The process is paradoxical, just because our civilizational age is the age of diversity, of the acknowledgment that diversity is the main source of creativity. It is also paradoxical because the political philosophy of our times and the policy orientation are toward the celebration of diversity. It is official, at least, in the EU.

Conclusively, the forbiddance of the certain language means:

- a. a legal interdiction to use it in the public space. (It is materialized in law, executive order, or any other type of legal text; in the provision of the legal and gradual sanctions for the dis-obedience; and the nomination of the authorities to implement it);
- b. a specific policy to support legal instruments in achieving goals such as the disappearance of political concepts from the target languages, as well as, the erasure of written or oral memories of a political reality other than the current one);
- c. a public mentality against the minorities' languages in general, and aggressively against the certain minorities' "strange languages".

#### *2.2.4 On the political forbiddance of certain language use in education and the public sphere*

The authorities forbid "the strange languages" used in the public space. The interdiction is issued for the native speakers and its goal is to force these languages into extinction. The goal is unveiled in the similar procedures which happened historically. To impose the Slavonic language as the liturgical languages in Wallachians' lands, the Bulgarian Tzar, Asan "forced the Wallachians, who until then had been reading (in the church, n. ns.) in Latin, to leave the Roman confession and not to read in Latin, but in Bulgarian, and commanded that he who reads in Latin to cut off his tongue, and since then the Wallachians have begun to read Bulgarian"<sup>13</sup>. (The popular imagination was so deeply impressed by the punishment, that after 1000 years the expression can be heard in the rural areas of Romania.) The legal

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<sup>13</sup> A. Xenopol. (1879): *Istoria românilor*, [History of the Romanians] Ediția a IV-a, București, 1985, vol. I, p. 299.

framework allowed in history any type of procedures against the use of the targeted languages, inclusively, the corporal punishments. In the 90th in ex-Yugoslavia, the pupils who spoke Romanian during the break were beaten by their teacher over their fingertips with a stick<sup>14</sup>. In the same period – in the Timoc Valley, the authorities ordered to erase the names (Romanian name) on the monuments (Crosses) in the Cemeteries. In other periods, the Romanians experienced the translation into Hungarian of their names and the names of their villages, rivers. The change of the toponyms resulted in double urban geography.

A special policy – a policy of assimilation of minorities - leads to social activities against the targeted languages. Their language is out of use in the state's institutions, in labeling products, in education, in the health care system, and so on. In some cases, the authorities proceeded extremely. After the instauration of the political regime called the Dualism Austro-Hungarians, the authorities immediately switched the languages of education in the Banat region. Adam Müller Guttenbrunn<sup>15</sup> reported how he, an outstanding student German speaker, in 1868 failed the majority of his exams because the language of education untimely changed, from German to Hungarian. Later on – in the 1890th – the Hungarians authorities – issued a *Guide to administrative officers*, how to proceed in Hungarianizing the names. The similar procedures of changing the language of education occurred in 1940. In the middle of the school year, for the pupils with Romanian mother tongue, the language of education untimely, became Hungarian.

Social consequences of the laws and policies against certain languages – minorities' languages and "strangers' language" – amplify the practices against the Others' languages, as well as, against the native speakers of those languages. The majoritarian population is discouraged to become bilingual or multilingual by learning minorities' languages. A Roma man told to the author: "They (his non-Roma friends) know Romany too, but they feel ashamed to admit it. The others will laugh at them!". Some extremists blame the native speakers of the minorities' languages; their limited knowledge of the official languages. In some cases, the extremists harass the minorities and even launched attacks against their too extended rights, linguistic in

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<sup>14</sup> According to a testimony of one of the beaten children, now a researcher in minorities problems, done to the author in 2016.

<sup>15</sup> A. Müller-Guttenbrunn, (1910): [A year spent in his homeland in the autobiographical novel *Little Swab*] *Un an petrecut pe meleagurile natale*, în *Micul Schwab*, versiunea în limba română de Erwin Lessl și Valentin Dima, Timișoara, Editura Facla, 1978, p. 40.

this case. The speakers are forced to deny that their native language is the targeted one.

Conclusively, the forbiddance of the certain language takes the forms like:

- a. a legal interdiction to use the language in the public space. (It is materialized in law, executive order, or any other type of legal text; in the preview of the legal and gradual punishments for the dis-obedience; and the nomination of the authorities to implement it)
- b. a specific policy to support the legal instruments in reaching its goal of extinction of the targeted language and the assimilation of its speakers;
- c. a public mentality against the minorities' languages in general, and aggressively against the certain minorities' "strange languages".

### *2.2.5 On the denying the xenophobia upon certain languages*

The majoritarian part of society and authorities are denying the existence of the xenophobic elements upon certain languages, simply by ignoring it as a reality. They claim this xenophobia is insignificant or it is simple non-senses.

In the cases when the majoritarian part of society and authorities admit there are claims on the xenophobia upon languages, that are not-ignorable, they:

1. publicly, take stands against the minorities' complaints that the limitation on their mother tongue use is an attack against their identity and on their future as a collective body;
2. emphasize how many rights to promote their languages the minorities got in recent times;

In some cases, there are public allegations raised by certain social groups, that the minorities' linguistic rights overpass the majorities ones and the state is suffocated under the burdens of providing financial, material, institutional, and human resources for the minorities' languages development.

The same social groups get angry and protest against "the nerve" of those that present factual arguments on xenophobia – largely called discrimination - upon their languages. These groups raise arguments against the accusers, arguments that are organized around some ideas as:

- a) the avoidance of some languages in education – even when they got the statute of the minorities' languages - is motivated by saying it is according to the law, to the *Constitution* that provides an official language;
- b) nobody forbids minorities' initiative to educate their members into their language and culture in the schools supported by themselves, or churches. (When a reply comes with

the mention, that the madrassas supported by the mosques, are an Islamic model, controlled politically and religiously by the Islamists states, and it is against the European democracy, they ignore the argument.)

Examining these stands on denying xenophobia, from the point of view of the Council of Europe' *Charter of the minorities' languages* or, of the *Minority Rights*, it is to say that:

- a) the authority ignorance of the xenophobia upon the language bears the political significance of lack of respect of the minorities' linguistic rights;
- b) the denying of the reality of the xenophobia upon the language is a majority and authorities' open position for disrespect.

### **2.3 Xenophobia against "the strange languages" speakers**

In a social environment customized to discriminate, defame, blame, hate and oppress some groups, new discrimination on a linguistic base, passes unnoticed. That is why there are not – or there are very few references<sup>16</sup> - on this social phenomenon.

As we understand it, looking at the reality in Romania and other European countries, the Xenophobia against "the strange languages" speakers consists in:

1. defaming, harassing, exposing to the hate discourse the speakers of the certain "strangers' languages", on the motif that they speak as mother tongues the languages that the majority labeled as "strange languages";
2. discriminating them by not ensuring equal conditions in using their mother tongue in the areas of work, education, administration, justice, and culture;
3. forcing them to internalize the defamation and to accept discrimination;
4. oppressing them by abuses of some individuals or even by some institutions; –
5. in the extreme cases, issuing laws to forbid those languages' use in the public space and to punish the speakers;
6. denying politically and socially the oppression against the strange languages and the persecutions of the speakers.

As a social process, the xenophobia on languages is operated by individuals, by the groups of the non-speakers, by those who claim they represent the entire society's voice. Xenophobia is practiced as an unconscious and organized process, but also as a

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<sup>16</sup> 14 According to a testimony, done to the author in 2016, one of them in school beaten children because she spoke in Romanian at the school, during the break.

mimetic one. Regarded from the inside of the xenophobic milieu, the xenophobia against the speakers of “the strange language” is viewed as natural and legitimate.

We do not go into details here, because the xenophobia on the speakers of the strange languages is simply to be deduced from the xenophobia on these languages. The problem "Does xenophobia against people who speak foreign languages cause xenophobia in those languages, or vice versa?" is a false one. In time they are simultaneous. Logically, it is an undecidable problem, like that with the egg and hen.

Xenophobia develops inside the milieu of “the strange languages” too. The victims of the general linguistic oppression, oppress themselves linguistically. They linguistically oppress the dialects and sub-dialects speakers. In the world of Roma's communities when somebody is getting married in another group than that of origins, he/she is forced to forget his/her mother tongue and to practice exclusively the adoptive language. The mother is prevented to teach her children her mother tongue. A Roma person that the author interviewed is proudly stated that his wife never speaks her mother tongue and the children practice only his language. When the author checked the information, it proves to be true in the traditional Roma families.

What about the attitude toward those who lost their mother tongue and became speakers of the majority language? Is it marketed by xenophobia too?

Thinking of the cases that we documented, those of them that forgot their mother tongue are rejected and despised by the entire community of the speakers. In Bihor County (Romania), those who forget the Romani language are stigmatized with a special name: Kesheri!

The xenophobia goes further: the groups left aside the solidarity with them, do not try to protect or defend them. Those who forgot their mother tongue are excluded, exposed to a severe form of xenophobia upon the speakers of “the strange languages”.

### **3. Does xenophobia toward strange languages causes xenophobia toward people?**

The social causes of the xenophobia upon the strange languages seem to be in the phobia against the marginalized people<sup>17</sup> and in despise toward them.

The most visible ones<sup>18</sup> are the spontaneous and fuzzy reactions of the

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<sup>17</sup> L. Pop, (2015): *Students Perception on Rroma in Romania* in “*Central European Political Science Review*”, no. 61/2015. pp. 94-114 [www.ce.polity.hu](http://www.ce.polity.hu).

<sup>18</sup> L. Pop, and I. Pop, (2020): *Xenophobia in 2020 Europe. A View on Xenophobic Political Parties*. in “*Central European Political Science Review*”, no. 82/2020. pp.11-46. [www.ce.polity.hu](http://www.ce.polity.hu).

ignorant (untutored) people confronted with their incapacity to decipher communications' contents of those marginalized Others which they interact with are.

Besides the mentioned spontaneous reactions, the causes of despise of the strangers' languages are in the intentional confusions created by the political manipulations of the marginalized peoples' issues in solving political problems (of domination, of rivalry among the different groups, of the oppressed group resistance or emancipations). The feeling of despising disseminated leads to acute fears and phobias from the marginalized peoples and violent reactions against them. The future victims of xenophobia are detected starting from the languages spoken. The languages per se are targeted when the extremist social forces claim that the marginal strangers are undermining the large society and the communications against it are conducted in those languages. Simply put, they claim that spies, thieves, other laws breakers, or even the plotters and terrorists use those languages in organizing plots against the regime's or, state's stability, against the large society's safety or security.

The last identified category of xenophobia's causes is the imitations of the xenophobia toward the marginalized from elsewhere. Paradoxically, copying solutions from elsewhere becomes a cause of xenophobia. Trying to overcome the social problems related to these "strange languages" or only perceived as such, by imitating the solutions from elsewhere, because the contexts are different fails. The failures acknowledged as efforts and social impotence turn into new fears and phobias towards the defeaters, seen as "the strange languages" speakers. The mentioned above failures enhance the xenophobic treatment of "the strange languages".

In brief, it is to admit that, at the first level of the analysis, the people that are perceived as strange lead to xenophobia in their languages.

At the deeper level, the causes look even more complex. Namely, the xenophobia against people develops on the basis of the identification of the strangers after their languages, un-comprehensible for the xenophobes. The strange languages are isolated in the large soundscape of the strangers' languages and connected exclusively with the marginalized groups. (Never with the prestigious ones, in spite they are incomprehensible too, they are regarded as of different category, of the foreign languages.)

Concluding, it is to see that a vicious circle develops and the strange



languages determine who the marginal strangers are, and vice versa the marginal strangers identified to lead to the labeling of their languages as strange. With any expansion of the circle the xenophobia increases. That is to say, that the xenophobia in languages leads to more xenophobia toward people and vice versa.

## Conclusions

The paper leads to the conclusion that we could notice phenomena as the xenophobia upon certain languages as a phenomenon that produces xenophobic effects and nurtures the spiral of xenophobia, by using the concept of xenophobia upon the strange languages.

The concept becomes operational by taking into account its relations with the concept of the stranger and strangers' languages and by paying attention to its' dimensions. The notion of strangers as it works in the society – according to the society's experiences, traditions, and cultural proposal – is the key for the content of strangers' languages, and its sub-category of strange languages, languages of the much-marginalized groups in the society. The five dimensions of the concept identified as sufficient and eloquent are the following: Ignorance of them as valuable means of communication or cultural expression; de-valorizing and despising and stigmatizing some languages as languages of the immoral and dangerous strangers; discouraging the targeted languages' development, not-considering those languages' official use in administration, in the justice system, in education even in the health-care system and not considering those languages' use in the country's culture, religious life, or social life; their legal ban; plus the social denying of xenophobia upon these languages.

The view on xenophobia upon the strange languages is completed by exploring the xenophobia against people taken as the strange languages' speakers and its role in the xenophobia spiral.

We consider the proposed definition of the phenomenon coined as xenophobia upon certain languages as a useful tool in identified and combatting xenophobia.

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