The Presence of the Romani Language in the Linguistic Landscape of Serbia: An Examination of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Strategies in Implementing Minority Language Rights

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MILES: MINORITY LANGUAGES IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES. DOCUMENTING, SAFEGUARDING, PLANNING.

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The Romani Language

- Indo-European (Indo-Aryan) language
- 3-4 million speakers worldwide
- 4 dialect groups: Balkan, Vlax, Central, Northern (Matras 2004, cf. Elšík 2020)
- minority language (European Charter for Regional or Minority languages, Serbia, 2005)
- endangered language (UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, Ethnologue, Endangered Languages Project)

Romani in Serbia

➢ minority language (Constitution of the Republic of Serbia & European Charter of regional or minority languages)

➢ endangered language (Unesco's Atlas, Ethnologue, ELP)

➢ Census 2022:

SERBIA CENUS 2022	
Ethnicity	131.936
Mother tongue	79.687

Language rights of the Roma in Serbia

➢ as a national minority, language rights of the Roma in Serbia is the same as of any other national minority in Serbia (Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks etc.)

➢ the use of the Romani language:
- in the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia
- in official institutions
- in the institutions of the local municipalities
- at court
- **in education**
- **in media**
- on official signs of settlements, street names…

The aim(s) of the study

➤ implementation of the language rights of the Roma in Serbia

    - visibility of Romani in the Serbian public space OR presence of Romani in the linguistic landscape of Serbia

    - absence of Romani from the public space in Serbia

    - scarcity of Romani in the LL of Serbia

➤ presentation of the fieldwork data

Theoretical background

➢ Linguistic landscape (LL) - the use of different languages on public signs

➢ examination of urban LL, rural LL, cyberspaces

➢descriptions and analyses of the language situation in a given country (Sciriha & Vassallo 2001)

➢ use of multiple languages within a wider geographical area (Kresling 2003)

➢ Aim:
  - to offer another view of social multilingualism
  - focusing on language choice, hierarchies in the use of different languages,
  - contact phenomena
  - literacy

➢ presence and/or absence of a given language in the public space are significant as they may lead to the identification of systemic patterns which can in turn result in a new understanding of different languages and social phenomena (Shohamy & Abu Ghazaleh-Mahajneh 2012: 89)

The Linguistic Landscape methodology/methodologies

➢ Top-down and bottom-up strategies in presenting the elements of the linguistic landscape

- top-down strategies involve the engagement of institutions, which act within local or central policies

- bottom-up strategies include individuals, actors in associations or corporations who have autonomous action within legal frameworks (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 10)

➢ Synchronic linguistic landscape (Synchronic LL) and the memorial linguistic landscape (Memorial LL)

- Synchronic LL - reflects the current language use, language prestige and language policy (the inscriptions of street names, the names of settlements)

- Memorial LL - represents a sort of chronicle of the multilingualism of past generations, introducing a diachronic perspective (the inscriptions on old houses, old monuments, epitaphs and other inscriptions on tombstones) (Sorescu-Marinković & Salamurović 2022: 52–70)

Methodologies applied in the study

➢ top-down & bottom-up strategies of the Romani languages use in the public sphere

➢ fieldwork research

Top-down strategies in implementing language rights of the Roma

1) education
- *Romani language with elements of national culture*
  - sufficient number of students
  - parents' permission
  - teachers enthusiasm

2) media
- Radio Television Vojvodina (*Amen adjes*, *Nevimata*)
  - the Radio Television Vojvodina website in Romani
  - *Amen adjes* > Internet presentation in Romani
- Radio Belgrade 1 (*Romano Them*)

3) official institutions – Romani is not in use

4) the Higher Court in Belgrade employs two court interpreters for Romani

5) *The Law on the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia*

Vojvodina   20. novembro 2017. | 12:00

Pokrajinaći Vlada ažutil e Rromen po lokalno niveli

Pokrajinaći vlada ađes ramosarda kontrakturja e foronenca te bišaj vazdelpe o trajo e Rromengo po majvučo nivelo.

Politika   20. novembro 2017. | 10:56

EU vi majdur bućarela e Akharnjasa palo bijadimasko jekhipe bućaripe po vazdipe e tolerancijako

Akharni palo jekhipe Brankica Janković maladilja e šerutne manušesa pe delegacija katar e Eu ande Srbija Semoa Fabricijoa.

Majnevo   Majđinado

Bottom-up strategies in presenting linguistic elements in public space

➢ individuals, self-organizations – initiators, investors.

➢ The Roma in Serbia

- bilingual in Romani and Serbian, Romani and minority languages, multilingual

- users of social welfare, work on black markets

- Romani is used in the private sphere, within family, in private correspondence

➢ presence of Romani on private signs cannot be expected – services are intended to majority population

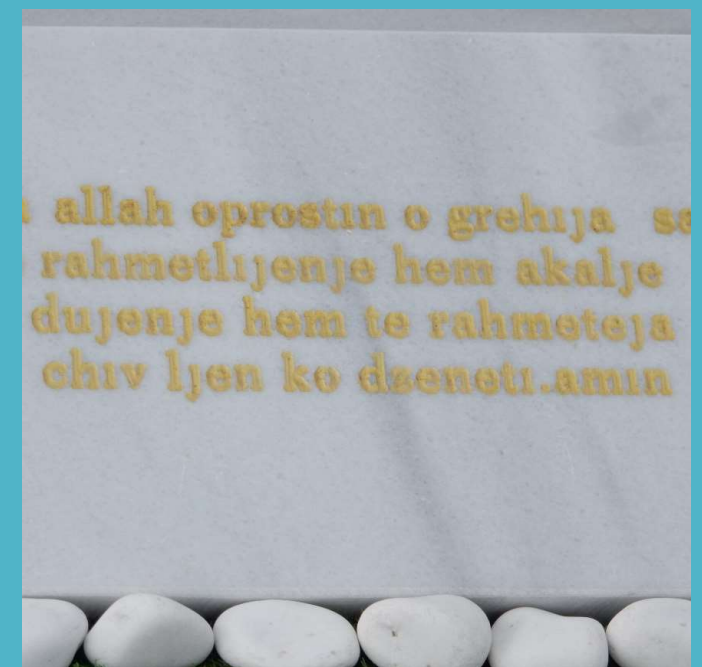➢ presence of Romani – on sacral monuments and tombstones.

Romani on sacral monuments

- ➢ monuments erected in Saint Bibi's honor
- ➢ Gurbet Roma Communities
- ➢ Eastern and Central Serbia

Romani on sacral monuments

Romani on tombstones

Concluding remarks

➢ the official language use
    - no systemic patterns
    - Romani is used only in the most visible domains (education and media)
    - functional messages

➢ private signs
-    private initiatives
-    randomly represented
-    not easy to gain
-    sacral monuments
-    tombstones

➢ sociolinguistic questionnaire
    - Roma <u>think</u> that they saw inscriptions on tombstones

THANK YOU!