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The Romani Language in the Linguistic Landscape of Serbia A (non)visible Minority Language

Abstract: According to the Serbian Constitution, aligned laws, and international conventions, the Romani language, along with other minority languages in Serbia, is guaranteed minority linguistic rights. However, Romani continues to be stigmatized and marginalized, resulting in its infrequent public usage and a decreasing intergenerational transmission of the language. The objective of this study is to emphasize the significance of Romani in the public sphere of Serbia. By examining the use of this language in public spaces, it is possible to ascertain its status, usage, and simultaneously identify its vitality or vulnerability. Based on a search by domain of the use of the Romani language, the paper comments on the use of the Romani language at the top-down level – the level of usage guaranteed by institutions and public and local policies, the advantages and disadvantages of its use, and the violation of language rights. In addition, the analysis also includes the bottom-up level of the usage of Romani, which is based on field research and the documentation of the use of the written Romani on sacred monuments and tombstones, initiated by individuals and/or locally organised groups, which indicate its symbolic function within the public space.

Key words: linguistic landscape, Romani language, official language use, public space, tombstones, Serbia

1 *The linguistic landscape*

Although a relatively new (socio)linguistic discipline,¹ the linguistic landscape, understood as the use of different languages on public signs, has

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¹ In one of the first works in the field of the linguistic landscape, published in 1997 by linguists Rodrigue Landry and Richard Y. Bourhis (1997, 25), the definition of linguistic landscape was determined as “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration”, which is often referred to by researchers in the contemporary studies in this field. A detailed overview of the various thematic, methodological and theoretical approaches to linguistic landscape research is provided in Gorter 2013.

resulted in numerous scientific works where the use of language in the public space is analysed from different perspectives. Such published scientific works examine urban and rural linguistic landscapes and cyberscapes, often incorporating semiotic research as complementary in observing the representation of the language and ethnicity of certain ethnic communities in the public space (Marten, Van Mensel & Gorter 2012). The concept of the linguistic landscape has been used in different ways, most often as descriptions and analyses of the language situation in a given country (Sciriha & Vassallo 2001), or the use of multiple languages within a wider geographical area (Kresling 2003). Understood in this way, the linguistic landscape can be synonymous with concepts such as the “linguistic market, linguistic mosaic, ecology of languages, diversity of languages or the linguistic situation” (Gorter 2006, 1). Today, the linguistic landscape is approached mainly from the perspective of studying multilingualism, where research into the linguistic landscape of minority languages in multilingual environments occupies a special place (Spolsky 2004; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Shohamy & Abu Ghazaleh-Mahajneh 2012; Puzey 2012, among others). Studies of the linguistic landscape aim to offer another view of social multilingualism, focusing on language choice, hierarchies in the use of different languages, contact phenomena, and literacy. The linguistic landscape is a multi-layered phenomenon and research in this area includes different perspectives and disciplines, with the most frequently applied being linguistics, sociolinguistics and language policy (Gorter 2013, 191).

The approach to researching the use of languages (one or more) offered by the linguistic landscape is advantageous for several reasons: a) it adopts a comprehensive view of written language in the public space, paying attention to each type of sign; b) research into the linguistic landscape not only take into account signs, but also who initiates, creates, places and reads them; c) the linguistic landscape offers insight into how language is manipulated – consciously or unconsciously – with the aim of confirming or refuting the existence of prestige patterns accorded a certain language as well as hierarchies among languages; d) the linguistic landscape allows for a deeper understanding of demographics and opportunities, as well as language and other policies towards different languages (Marten, Van Mansel & Gorter 2012, 1).

In addition to the aforementioned, the concept of the linguistic landscape in multilingual environments is also included in the list of domains which serve to determine the status of a minority language (Edwards 2010), as well as the important domain of literacy and the role of written tradition in research (Spolsky 2009). Furthermore, efforts to preserve and revitalise minority languages are supported by the state, regional and local administrations, as well as numerous non-governmental organisations. Therefore, the linguistic landscape, understood as written language in the public space, represents the space in which

official regulations and private initiatives can combine or conflict in the use of different languages (Gorter, Aiesaran & Cenoz 2012, 148–149). Studies of the linguistic landscape involving the 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).

One of the first steps in laying the foundation for an analysis of the linguistic landscape is to distinguish between 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, while bottom-up strategies include individuals, actors in associations or corporations who have autonomous action within legal frameworks (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006, 10).

Bearing in mind all of the above – the theoretical assumptions, which have remained more or less the same since the genesis of the discipline, with minor fluctuations in methodology, applied to new technological achievements, the linguistic landscape remains a discipline which predominantly deals with urban space, visibility, absence and hierarchy among languages, while research studies on the rural linguistic landscape are less frequently represented (cf. e.g. Davely & Ferguson 2009; Kotze & Du Plessis 2010).

1.1. *Studies of the linguistic landscape in Serbia*

Although research into the linguistic landscape in Serbia started slightly later than the initial research in other parts of the world, which began at the end of the 20th century, Serbia is not lagging behind in this respect. In fact, the rise of such studies in Serbia is almost parallel to that in the rest of the world. In contrast to research into the linguistic landscape of cities - or the urban linguistic landscape, which predominates in international scientific literature, in Serbia the focus of research, with the exception of a few rare cases (e.g. Vuković 2012), has shifted to the rural linguistic landscape and the linguistic landscape of cemeteries, focusing on a specific audience, and making the conscious choice of epitaphs and inscriptions in the rural public space as true representations of ethnicity (Soresku-Marinković 2021, 55).²

The works of linguists in Serbia are dominated by studies of multicultural and multilingual environments, by analyses of inscriptions in the Serbian,

² A series of publications were released at the beginning of the 21st century on the subject of Serbian tombstones in Hungary, in St Andrea specifically, which were firstly documented and published, and subsequently analysed from a linguistic perspective (Vulović, Đinđić & Jovanović 2008; Vulović, Đinđić & Radonjić 2010; Vulović et al. 2009; Vulović et al. 2012).

Hungarian and Croatian languages in the public space of the city of Subotica (Vuković 2012), the Banat-Bulgarian language in the linguistic landscape of the villages where this ethnic community is most represented in Serbia (Sikimić & Nomači 2016), and the Romanian language in the settlements in the Serbian part of Banat (Popović & Janjić 2013; Soresku-Marinković 2021). These studies also examine the relationship and status of different languages in multilingual environments, such as the village of Ečka in Serbian Banat (Sorescu-Marinković & Salamurović 2022), or the villages in eastern Serbia mostly populated by Vlachs, bilingual speakers of the Serbian and Vlach languages (Huțanu & Sorescu-Marinković 2016; Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu (forthcoming)).

The results of research into the urban linguistic landscape in Serbia indicate the relative status of certain languages in the local socio-linguistic context - official inscriptions reflect the official promotion of trilingualism (Serbian-Hungarian-Croatian) in the city of Subotica, while private inscriptions strive for simpler communication, which in practice means monolingualism³ (Vuković 2012, 175). Researching the linguistic landscape of the multi-ethnic and multilingual village of Ečka in Serbian Banat, authors Annemarie Sorescu Marinović and Aleksandra Salamurović conclude that instead of top-down and bottom-up levels of usage of official languages in this village and strategies for observing the linguistic landscape, greater consideration should be given to the synchronic linguistic landscape (Synchronic LL) and the memorial linguistic landscape (Memorial LL). The former, Synchronic LL, reflects the current language use, language prestige and language policy – the inscriptions of street names, the names of settlements, the current language use, language prestige and language policy are all multilingual – there are multilingual street name inscriptions, inscriptions on road signs and the premises of local institutions and bodies, but also graffiti and obituaries (Sorescu-Marinković & Salamurović 2022, 52, 64–70), while the latter, Memorial LL, represents a sort of chronicle of the multilingualism of past generations, introducing a diachronic perspective, which is reflected in the inscriptions on old houses (mainly family names on old Vojvodina houses), old monuments, as well as epitaphs and other inscriptions on tombstones (idem, 52, 70).

The minority Banat-Bulgarian language in Serbia is recognised as official only in the village of Ivanovo, where the number of Banat Bulgarians makes up 15% of the total population, which is reflected in the existence of official public inscriptions in the Banat-Bulgarian language (in addition to the official languages – majority Serbian and minority Hungarian) on street names, pri-

³ Vuković emphasises that in private inscriptions deviation from monolingualism (in the specific case of the Serbian language) does occur, whereby a minority language is used only in cases where the aim is to win over speakers of that minority language, who are considered potential clients (Vuković 2012, 175).

mary schools, the premises of local municipal offices, etc. (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016, 12–13). Unlike Ivanovo, where the Banat-Bulgarian language is one of the official languages, in the villages of Jaša Tomić, Konak and Skorenovac, which despite being inhabited by Banat Bulgarians, are not registered in sufficient numbers for their language to be recognised as official, the use of the language is reflected only in the domain of private use – on tombstones. The use of the language on tombstones also indicates literacy in the given language, since there is no formal education in the Banat-Bulgarian language, so it is assumed that the speakers of this language, who order the tombstones, only know its oral form (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016, 25–26). The existence of inscriptions in Banat-Bulgarian on tombstones is an example of the prestige of this language (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016, 25). The minority Romanian language in Serbia, more precisely in the Serbian part of Banat, is not only the language of public inscriptions in areas inhabited by the Romanian population, but is also the language used by its speakers for extremely creative purposes, such as for epitaphs on tombstones. Epitaphs represent a valuable source for linguistic research into the relationship between the standard and local varieties of the Romanian language⁴ spoken in Romanian settlements, and the texts of these epitaphs, often in Serbian and Romanian, demonstrate the prestige of the Romanian language since they are more developed and longer in terms of content, and in addition, often include quotations from the literary works of eminent Romanian writers (Soresku-Marinković 2021, 59–62). In Eastern Serbia, which has no tradition or continuity of multilingualism, numerous settlements are inhabited by Vlachs, who are also a national minority in Serbia. According to Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković and Monica Huțanu, since 2005 epitaphs in the Vlach variety have emerged, whose codification and standardisation have seen a rapid development in recent years. Since in Eastern Serbia there are still no official regulations regarding the use of Vlach in the public space, the use of Vlach on memorials, in the form of epitaphs, indicates the symbolic value of this language, used as markers of identity or as support for the legitimisation of minority speech (Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu 2016, 27; Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu (forthcoming)).⁵

⁴ Researchers point to the dominance of the local Romanian variety in relation to the standard Romanian language, as well as dialectal features, spelling mistakes, the influence of the Serbian language on the orthography of the local Romanian variety, etc. (Popović & Janjić 2013; Sorescu-Marinković 2021).

⁵ The authors analyse the inscriptions on the tombstones from the perspective of their content - the use of “technical” terms and phrases, such as “Here he lies” or “The memorial has been erected”, which are taken from the Serbian language (Soresku-Marinković & Huțanu 2016, 34), as well as the use of hypocoristics and patronymics in Vlach (Soreska-Marinković & Huțanu 2016, 31). In addition, the authors draw attention to linguistic notes about the Vlach language – especially from the perspective of the high degree of variability of the written language (Soresku-Marinković & Huțanu 2016, 35).

1.2. *The Romani language and linguistic landscape - an under-researched field*

As mentioned in numerous works in the field of linguistic landscape research, in addition to public language policies and the enforcement of various laws regulating language use, the use of minority languages in the public space also reflects the prestige of the languages written in the public space, serving as an emblem of identity and belonging to a certain ethnic community, at the same time identifying systematic patterns which lead to the understanding of different languages as social phenomena (cf. e.g. Cenoz & Gorter 2006; Shohamy & Abu Gharleh-Mahajneh 2012; Sikimić 2016; Huţanu & Soresku-Marinković 2016; Sorescu-Marinković & Huţanu (forthcoming), among others).

The visibility of minority languages in the public space, their status, prestige, role and the like have sparked debate about the use of the Romani language in the public space, since, on the one hand, it is a minority language in numerous European countries, while on the other, it remains an under-researched area in the linguistic landscape. The Romani language is always a marginalised language (Bašić 2018), “it is a language of lower prestige to be found even on tombstones” (Sikimić 2016, 25), and is characterised by linguistic mimicry and one-way bilingualism (Friedman 2001, 148–149; Bašić 2018).⁶ It is precisely because Romani is recognised as a minority language and its use is clearly defined as such both by the laws of the Republic of Serbia and international conventions. The aim of this paper is to examine whether Romani is really visible in the public space of Serbia. In order to achieve this goal, the paper will first discuss Romani itself, its dialects and distribution, as well as domains of use. Given that the emphasis will be placed on the public space of Serbia, following some general remarks about Romani in Serbia demographic data on the Roma population in Serbia and their language rights will be provided, and the practical application of those legal regulations which take into account this minority language in different domains will be discussed. The analysis will be conducted on material documented over the past ten years in field research carried out in different Roma, multi-cultural and multilingual communities in Serbia, with the objective of examining the visibility of Romani and its presence in different domains.

⁶ Although the Serbian language, as well as numerous other languages with which Romani comes into contact, includes loanwords from Romani, they belong to the linguistic repertoire of slang, and this does not mean that borrowings from Romani contain elements of two-way bilingualism (cf. e.g. Uhlik 1954; Matras 1998; 2002; Vučković 2017; 2022; Sonnemann 2021, among others). Furthermore, it is not entirely certain whether part of the slang lexicon, which originates from Romani speakers, is recognised as Romani. The lower prestige of the Romani language is also shown in the lack of interest of non-Roma students in attending Romani language classes as an optional subject at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, which resulted in the closure of the Romani Language Department.

2. *The Romani language*

The Romani language, which belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, or more precisely the Indo-Aryan group, boasts a rich tradition of research spanning diverse domains of its linguistic structure. A large number of fundamental scientific studies on Romani provide insight into the history of this language (e.g. Matras 2002; Beníšek 2020), dialectal diversity and distribution of dialects (e.g. Matras, Bakker & Kyuchukov 1997; Matras 2002; 2005; Elšík & Beníšek 2020),⁷ the grammatical structure of Romani and its dialects (Hancock 1995; Courthiade 1998; Matras 2002; Boretzky 1993; 1994; 2000; 2003; Tenser 2005; Leggio 2011; Mirić 2019; 2021; Elšík 2020; Adamou & Matras 2020, among others), the lexicography of Romani (e.g. Uhlik 1941; 1983; Boretzky & Iglá 1994; Kajtazi 2008; Ćirković & Mirić 2017; Oslon & Kožanov (online))⁸, sociolinguistic issues (Friedman 1995; 1999; Matras 2002; Halwachs 2003; 2011; 2017; Halwachs et al. 2015; among others), various contact phenomena between Romani and other languages (Matras 2007; 2009; Matras & Adamou 2020; Adamou 2016; Adamou & Granqvist 2015; Bodnárova & Wiedner 2020; Friedman 2020; Meyer 2020; Scala 2020; Ćirković & Mirić 2022; Mirić & Ćirković 2022)⁹ and so on. Researchers should not neglect phenomena such as para-Romani varieties (which are the intermediate stage in language replacement), language loss and language shift as a consequence of the interrupted intergenerational transmission, or extinct Romani varieties which have not been described or linguistically investigated.

In the literature relevant to the Romani language, there is still a great deal of speculation about the number of speakers of this language. The frequently cited data on the number of speakers of Romani comes from one source – UNESCO's *Atlas of The World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010, printed version), which specifies approximately 3.5 million Romani speakers in the world. According to the same source, the distribution of the Romani language is limited predominantly to Europe, and to a lesser extent to North and South America

⁷ The study carried out by Elšík and Beníšek in 2020 is of particular importance for the review of the dialects of the Romani language - both in terms of structure and areas of use, which, in addition to citing what has now become classic literature, also incorporates the results of the latest linguistic and dialectological research, including a more detailed classification of Romani dialects and their distribution in the region.

⁸ RomLex, a lexical database of different Romani varieties available online at: <http://romani.uni-graz.at/romlex/whatisromani.xml> (accessed on 12/4/2023) should also be added to the aforementioned classic dictionaries and lexicographic publications.

⁹ Here, only the most recent studies dealing with the aforementioned issues in Romani language research are listed, but it is necessary to note that they provide an exhaustive analysis of the examined phenomena with an overview of previously published relevant literature.

and Australia. It should be borne in mind that although this data is often cited and is the only available information, it should be viewed with caution for several reasons. First of all, this information has remained unchanged since 2009, when the interactive map of the *Atlas* first became available online, and the number of Roma (and probably speakers of other languages and varieties registered in this *Atlas*) has not been updated following numerous population censuses conducted in European countries over the last 20 years. Moreover, demographic factors pertaining to the assessment and projections of the number of members of the Roma ethnic community have not been taken into account either. In addition, it is important to note that one of the important reasons for the insufficiently precise number of Roma is the social status of the members of the Roma community – their political, economic, and cultural marginalisation, as well as their ethnic and linguistic stigmatisation (cf. Filipović, Vučo & Djurić 2010, 261). Majority languages cover public domains of language use, while the use of the Romani language is limited to informal domains (Halwachs 2020, 430).

The number of speakers of a language is one of the crucial factors in determining the endangerment and/or vitality of a language. In linguistics, Romani is often cited as an endangered language, and this information is available in various international databases which document endangered languages around the world – UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010), *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2013) and *Endangered Languages Project* (Lee & van Way 2016). The limitations of these databases are numerous – starting from the imprecise demarcation of languages and dialects, through the incorrect location of Romani dialects within a certain territory, to the classification of the threat to the Romani language (cf. Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020). Linguists consider the criteria used to assess Romani in UNESCO's *Atlas* inadequate, as they treat the Romani language as a whole, overlooking its dialectal heterogeneity and the need to assess the endangerment and vitality of individual Romani varieties (Halwachs 2020, 432), believing that the assessment of endangerment must include factors such as the dialectal variation of this language and the different degree of endangerment/vitality at the level of communities and individual speakers (Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020, 96). Halwachs (2020, 432) asserts that only basic definitions of language endangerment allow for an assessment of the threat and/or vitality of Romani in the sense that the language is vital if the community uses it as a primary means of communication in private and daily life.

In addition to an endangered language, Romani is also often referred to as a minority language, and 30 years ago (1993) the Council of Europe declared the Roma to be “the true European minority” (Guy 2003; Filipović, Vučo & Djurić 2010, 261). The status of minority languages is regulated by the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, which guarantees linguistic rights to re-

gional or minority languages within the domains of “education, judicial authorities, administrative authorities and public services, media, cultural activities and facilities, economic and social life, and trans-frontier exchanges”.¹⁰ The *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* was established by the Council of Europe in 1992, and some of its provisions in the domain of recognising the Romani language as a minority language have been implemented by Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. A little earlier, in 1991, in the constitutions of three European countries – Finland, Austria and North Macedonia – Romani was recognised as a minority language according to the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Parliament. In addition to the *Charter* and the recommendations of other European institutions, various forms of official government support, without specific legal provisions, have also been implemented by the governments of Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Norway and Italy. These mainly refer to the creation of educational materials in Romani, as well as instructions, financing and training for teachers of Romani (Matras 2002, 258–259). However, as Matras points out (2002, 259), many of the mentioned initiatives have failed to function fully and regularly. Today, the Romani language is recognised as a minority language by the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden and Ukraine.¹¹ The Romani language has been the subject of numerous scientific studies. During the 1990s, Romani language classes were introduced into the curricula of sixteen different universities in Europe and the United States of America, which continue to hold scientific conferences, seminars and workshops dedicated to the Romani language to this day (Matras 2002, 259).

2.2. *The public domains of use of the Romani language*

Bearing in mind the fact that Romani is recognised around the world as both an endangered and minority language, as well as generally stigmatised and marginalised, but that its use is regulated (at least declaratively) by various internationally recognised acts, scientific studies indicate its use in different domains – in education, literature, digital media, social networks, etc.

In terms of the use of Romani in education, linguists highlight the status of Romani as part of the political agenda, underlining the existence of a correla-

¹⁰ The text of the charter is available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/text-of-the-charter> (accessed on 30/5/2023)

¹¹ Mentioned languages are available at the link of the chapter <https://rm.coe.int/november-2022-revised-table-languages-covered-english-/1680a8fef4> (accessed on 29/5/2023).

tion between bottom-up and top-down strategies in the implementation of Romani in official and unofficial educational curricula. Although the introduction of Romani in education depends on the cooperation of non-governmental organisations and a positive attitude towards linguistic diversity on the part of the government sector, as pointed out by Dieter Halwachs (2020, 442–444), joint efforts and compromises can result in the introduction of Romani into the education system, but not necessarily its integration into regular educational curricula. The situation is similar with the presence of Romani in digital media,¹² especially the Internet (Leggio 2020), which is characterised by differences between the use of the language by activists and non-activists. As Leggio notes, activists take institutionalised written practice into account, to the extent possible in terms of non-standardised language. The standardisation of Romani turns out to be an insufficiently important factor in the use of the language. According to Leggio (2020, 531), the virtual world of Roma non-activists represents a wide range of linguistic repertoires reflecting their individual identities. Conversations and dialogue on Facebook groups are characterised by cross-dialect variation and the use of different linguistic features (Granqvist 2021). A similar study focusing on different video clips in Romani on the YouTube platform was carried out by Leggio and Matras (Leggio & Matras 2017) to investigate the linguistic features of the written Romani. The authors found the written Romani in the comments posted on the YouTube platform to be characterised by a high degree of variation in terms of both dialectology and orthography.¹³ As for Romani in the literature, Sofiya Zahova (2020) distinguishes between Romani literature and literature in the Romani language, differentiating between the use of the Romani language as a medium of creative expression and the language into which both literature written by Roma authors and literature translated into the Romani language is translated. The author also points out the challenges of distribution, reception and availability faced by Romani literature (Zahova 2020, 560).

As the aforementioned domains of Romani language usage partially indicate, an important question for the public space, the public and the visibility of Romani in different public domains relates to the standardisation of Romani, which is a frequently asked question in many European countries, even when a language variety has already been established as standard. Although traditional practice tends to establish one variety as the standard, many researchers con-

¹² Daniele Victor Leggio has previously dealt with the use of Romani in the virtual world – mainly on the radio, exploring how this public use reflects on Romani identity (Leggio 2015).

¹³ On orthography as a convention, see more in: Matras 2002, 258–259.

sider a pluricentric approach to the standardisation of the Romani language to be more appropriate (Matras 2005; Halwachs 2020, among others).¹⁴

3. *The Romani language in Serbia*

The Romani language in Serbia is considered an endangered language on the one hand, and a minority language on the other. It is documented as an endangered language by all the relevant databases of endangered languages (*UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, *Ethnologue*, *Endangered Languages Project*), however, as previously discussed (Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020), it is not entirely clear on which data these international bases used by the global academic community are based. On the one hand, when it comes to the Romani language (although similar problems are faced by other languages and varieties found in these databases, here the focus will only be on the Romani language) the number of speakers is not entirely precise, and the sources from which such data is drawn are not provided in the databases either. What attracts even greater attention are the Romani varieties, some of which are certainly not registered in Serbia, and as far as the number of Romani speakers is concerned, these databases do not list the data on which the dialectal diversity of the Romani language in Serbia is based (*idem*, 84). Despite the existence of a number of Roma groups in Serbia who speak different Roma varieties, they mostly belong to two Romani dialect branches – Vlax and Balkan. While it can be assumed that there are certain Roma communities which linguistically belong to other Romani varieties in Serbia, the relevant literature does not include this data.¹⁵ It is worth emphasising that Serbia, which has a large Roma population, has no data on their distribution or the varieties they speak, which could serve as the basis for both linguistic and interdisciplinary research.¹⁶ In Serbia, there is

¹⁴ An extensive list of literature on the standardisation and codification of the Romani language and its history is available at: <https://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/db/bibliography/index.html?cat=22>.

¹⁵ The middle of the 20th century, 1979, saw the publication of the study *Ethnological material on the Roma - Gypsies in Vojvodina* (the research was carried out in the 1960s, while the monograph was published in 1979), prepared by Mirjana Maluckov, who observed the Roma communities in a large number of settlements in Vojvodina, their striking ethnographic characteristics, the work they did, etc. It is important to note that Maluckov also recorded local names – ethnonyms and exonyms – for the investigated Roma communities and groups, but what is missing in this valuable field monograph is linguistic data on these Roma communities. Although such an ethnographic study was not expected to provide such data, to this day it remains (almost) the only study which documents the Roma communities in Vojvodina (Maluckov 1979).

¹⁶ Numerous Romological studies have been carried out on the territory of Serbia from sociological, anthropological, ethnographic, and demographic perspectives. However,

a Roma community in almost every urban and rural settlement (integrated into the majority population or geographically separated), but they are not found on the map, which would be valuable both for further research and the correction of existing databases (cf. Ćirković 2018). What is striking is the number of foreign researchers who remained on the territory of Serbia from the 19th to the end of the 20th century to collect valuable data on this topic (Ćirković 2018, 231–235). However, the drawbacks of such large projects are inevitable, so today the Serbian academic community still faces numerous problems that do not belong to the academic domain at all. The first systematic study of a Roma community in Serbia began in 2016, continued in 2017 and ended in 2018, conducted by researchers from the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.¹⁷ Although the volume of the material, and therefore the corpus, is small, this research resulted in numerous scientific studies which introduced Serbia into the global academic community of Romology (cf. Sikimić 2017; Ćirković & Mirić 2017; Mirić 2019a; 2019b; 2021a; 2021b; Sikimić 2018 (ed.); Ćirković & Mirić 2022; Mirić & Ćirković 2022).

3.1. *Census data on the Roma population in Serbia*

The last census of population, households and dwellings was conducted in 2022, and currently only data on ethnicity and gender are available. According to these data, the number of Roma in Serbia stands at 131,936. Mother tongue data is unavailable, so it is not possible to state how many Roma have declared the Romani language as their mother tongue. According to the 2011 census, 147,604 citizens declared Roma ethnicity, while 100,668 speakers declared Romani as their mother tongue. These numbers are important because the percentage of Roma in relation to the total population of the Republic of Serbia enables the realisation of linguistic and other rights. It is important to note that the census numbers are lower than the estimated number of Roma and speakers of Romani in Serbia, as is the case with other countries in Central and Southern Europe (Surdu 2016, 139–148).¹⁸

these studies are generally not suitable or reliable for linguistic research (for an overview of the research and literature, cf. Ćirković 2018).

¹⁷ The research was carried out within the project “Language and Folklore of the Roma in Knjaževac”, supported by the National Library “Njegoš” from Knjaževac, and financed in 2016 and 2017 by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia. The research was continued in 2018 within the project “Language, folklore and migrations in the Balkans” of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA.

¹⁸ According to the study “Romska naselja, uslovi života i mogućnosti integracije Roma u Srbiji” (Roma settlements, living conditions and the possibilities of the integration of the Roma in Serbia) (Jakšić & Bašić 2005), the estimated number of Roma is 247,591.

The reasons for the discrepancy between census data and data in the field are numerous – as stigmatised and marginalised Roma have a tendency to conceal their ethnic and linguistic identity. Through self-identification as part of a more prestigious ethnicity (majority or minority), the members of the Roma community avoid such discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation. In addition, frequent work and temporary migration to the countries of Western Europe make it difficult to determine the exact number of Roma, given their frequent fluctuation. Furthermore, mixed marriages should be taken into consideration as mixed marriages between members of the Roma and other ethnic communities are common, while strict census questionnaires do not provide for ethnic pluralism. Therefore, descendants from mixed marriages may have problems declaring only one ethnic affiliation. The situation with the “mother tongue” is similar since Romani has always been in contact with other languages in the recent and distant past alike. Therefore, in most cases, the Roma are bilingual or multilingual (Mirić & Ćirković 2022, 19). During early childhood the Roma acquire Romani as the language of their family environment, simultaneously acquiring the Serbian language within the broader social context, thus rendering both languages as their mother tongue (Mirić 2019a). The situation with census data and questionnaires is similar to that of ethnicity – the questionnaires do not allow for the expression of two mother tongues, so during the Census, the members of the Roma community must choose one. In multi-ethnic communities, mixed marriages, and conditions of stigmatisation and discrimination, it is only to be expected that linguistic identity remains concealed, and that during the census, efforts are made to declare the more prestigious majority language as the mother tongue.¹⁹

3.2. *The linguistic rights of the Roma in Serbia*

As already mentioned, the linguistic rights of the Roma, as a minority ethnic group, are recognised by the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, ratified in 2006, but also by the *Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts*, which forms part of the local legislation of the Republic of Serbia. *The Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts* is harmonised with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and guarantees the use of minority languages in areas where they constitute a significant part of the population, and state bodies, organisations entrusted with public powers, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units are obliged to conduct proceedings in the mi-

¹⁹ Even in the Census conducted in 2022, the introduction of ethnic and linguistic pluralism was not considered, and imprecise data can be expected when it comes to the number of Roma and Romani as a mother tongue in Serbia.

minority language. In addition, the right to education in the minority language in the state institutions of the autonomous provinces is guaranteed, as well as the right to use their first and last names in their own language, and in areas where there is a significant population, traditional local place names, street names, settlements and topographical signs are also written in their language.²⁰

In addition, the *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities* stipulates that a local self-government unit is obliged to introduce the language of a national minority into official use if, according to the last population census, at least 15% of the members of that minority live on its territory.²¹ The official use of the language and scripts of the national minority also includes the right of MPs – members of the national minority to address the parliament in their own language if they represent a national minority which makes up at least 2% of the total population. The decision on the introduction of the language of the national minority into official use is made by the local self-government assembly. The same percentage of members of the national minority (2%) is also necessary to exercise the right to address state authorities in their own language and to have the right to receive an answer in that language (Bašić 2018, 16).

Although the laws regulate the rights of national minorities, including the Roma, the standardisation of the language is often mentioned as one of the problems concerning the Romani language in Serbia (but not only in Serbia). In 2013, the National Council of the Romani National Minority adopted a resolution on the standardisation of Romani, however, according to Lukin Saitović (2018, 32–33), the standardisation of Romani in Serbia is a permanent, long-term process, which began during the period of the existence of the former Yugoslavia, resulting in divergent processes of language planning in the states which emerged after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Since the use of Romani in Serbia is guaranteed by various legal frameworks, the visibility of elements of Romani in the linguistic landscape of Serbia which stem from formal institutions and organisations are considered a top-down level of language use. Further in the text, the application of the right to the visibility of Romani as a minority language will be considered in those domains guaranteed by the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, and the *Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts of the Republic of Serbia*, as well

²⁰ Article 10 of the Constitution, “Official Gazette of RS”, no. 98/2006, according to Bašić 2018, 14.

²¹ Paragraph 2, Article 10 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, according to Bašić 2018, 15.

as other relevant laws pertaining to the regulation of the status and rights of national minorities.²²

4. *The top-down level and official use of the Romani language in the public space of Serbia*

4.1. *The use of the Romani language in the domain of law (judicial and administrative authorities)*

According to the population and household Census of the Republic of Serbia from 2011, the number of Roma in the Republic of Serbia is exactly 2.05%.²³ *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, as well as the *Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts in the Republic of Serbia* guarantee the Roma community the right to speak in their native language in the Parliament, local self-government units, state bodies, organisations entrusted with public powers, the bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units. In state bodies where legal proceedings are conducted, such proceedings can be conducted in the Romani language.

In order to uphold this right, the Higher Court in Belgrade employs two court interpreters for Romani.²⁴ An example of the violation of this guaranteed right in practice proved to be decisive in the case of proceedings against a defendant in 2016 in the Supreme Court of Cassation in Belgrade, because the court failed to “inform the defendant, who declared that his mother tongue was Romani, about the right to use his language and nor was the defendant’s statement in this regard recorded”.²⁵

Apart from the aforementioned laws, the *Law on the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia* also enables MPs to speak in their own language at sessions of the National Assembly, as well as to submit written documents in their own language. According to the law and the rules of the National Assembly, the

²² The language rights of the Roma in Serbia have been commented on several times in works by Mirjana Mirić (cf. e.g. Mirić 2019a; 2021a).

²³ On this occasion, the data from the 2011 Census are cited as this Census data was analysed in the aforementioned studies, on the basis of which we can discuss the linguistic rights of the Roma in Serbia. Data from the census conducted in 2022 are available only for nationality and gender, according to which the percentage of Roma in the total population of Serbia is 1.98%.

²⁴ The names of court interpreters for Romani, along with their contact information, are listed on the website of the Higher Court in Belgrade (available at: <https://www.bg.vi.sud.rs/tekst/539/sudski-tumaci-za-romski-jezik.php>, accessed on 30/5/2023)

²⁵ The reasoning of the Supreme Court of Cassation PR 14/2016 is available at: <https://www.vk.sud.rs/sr-lat/kzz-pr-142016> accessed on 20/4/2023.

Secretary General of the National Assembly is obliged to provide simultaneous translation of his presentation, as well as that of any documents submitted (Bašić 2018, 16). Therefore, if there are members of parliament of Roma nationality in the National Assembly, they are able to use their own language. Although the Roma are included in the work of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia as deputies (it is inappropriate to mention their names here), in practice they do not exercise their right to speak in their own language at the sessions of the National Assembly.

4.2. *The use of the Romani language in education*

Today, the Romani language in Serbia is considered standardised (Đurić 2012), which has essentially enabled the introduction of optional classes in Romani in the form of the subject the *Romani language with elements of national culture*, for which purpose Romani language textbooks were created (cf. e.g. Đurić & Koko 2018).

The problem which arises in connection with the realization of this Roma national minority right is the availability and distribution of textbooks. Textbooks are not available in all schools to all teachers, and the teachers of the Romani language create teaching materials and improvised textbooks themselves (Mirić 2019a, 167; Mirić 2021a, 40). Since the *Romani language with elements of national culture* is an optional subject in primary schools in Serbia, and is organised only on the basis of a “sufficient” number of registered students, it is not entirely transparent (the official website of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia does not have such data) in which schools it is possible to attend such optional classes and on what the organisation of classes depends. According to Marija Aleksandrović, the optional subject *Romani language with elements of national culture* is implemented in 68 schools throughout Serbia with 2,467 students from in elementary schools (Aleksandrović 2021, 221). This number of schools and students has fluctuated slightly from 2016 to 2021, the period the author observed (Aleksandrović 2021, 222).”

One of the problems is the insufficient number of qualified teachers for Romani. Although in 2015 the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade established the Department for the Romani Language, which would enable both Roma and non-Roma students to acquire the necessary qualifications to teach Romani in schools (Bašić 2018, 24–25; Aleksandrović 2021, 222), the department was closed because of a lack of interested students (Ćirković 2018, 245). In addition to the Department for the Romani Language at the Faculty of Philology, the “Mihailo Pavlov” College of Vocational Studies for Educators in Vršac (Aleksandrović 2021, 222) also provides training for teaching staff,

but so far no information has been published about their possible employment opportunities.

4.3. *The use of the Romani language in the media and Internet content*

The aforementioned legal acts also serve to regulate the use of the Romani language as the language of the Roma national minority in the field of information. Two public services broadcast programmes in Romani – Radio Television Vojvodina (RTV) and Radio Television Serbia (RTS). On RTV's second channel, news programmes are broadcast daily in the languages of national minorities, including in Romani, while specialist programmes have a special programming scheme.²⁶ RTS, more precisely Radio Belgrade 1, broadcasts the show *Romano Them* every day, with the most important national and international news in Romani and Serbian.²⁷ It is important to note that the RTV website is available in the languages of national minorities, therefore also in Romani, and the programme in Romani,²⁸ *Amen Adjes*, also has an Internet presentation in Romani.²⁹

The strategy for the social inclusion of the Roma community in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022-2030 23/2022-3 envisages “Empowering Roma men and women to access their rights and preserve their identity” (Measure 1.2.) through various measures, including the establishment of cultural institutions, but also the development of informative programmes in Romani in areas inhabited by a significant percentage of members of the Roma national minority.³⁰ The strategy does not include special measures for the printed media, however, the strategy for the improvement of the position of the Roma in the Republic of Serbia from 2009 promoted the publication of print media in Romani.³¹

The competent institutions for implementing these measures are the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the National

²⁶ The programming schedule is available at: https://www.rtv.rs/sr_ci/program/drugi-program/satnica (accessed on 21/4/2023).

²⁷ Information about the programme is available at: <https://www.rts.rs/lat/radio/radio-beograd-1/emisija/3556/romano-them.html?s=3556> (accessed on 21/04/2023).

²⁸ The Roma version of the RTV website is available at: <https://www.rtv.rs/rom/> (accessed on 21/4/2023).

²⁹ Available at: <https://media.rtv.rs/rom/amen-adjes/80423> (accessed on 21/4/2023).

³⁰ The text of the strategy is available at: <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2022/23/1> (accessed on 21/4/2023).

³¹ The text of the strategy for improving the position of the Roma in the Republic of Serbia 27/2009-3 is available at: <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2009/27/1/reg> (accessed on 21/4/2023).

Council of the Roma National Minority of the Republic of Serbia. Bearing in mind the aforementioned strategy, as well as the competent institutions for the implementation of that strategy, namely in the field of information and culture, it is important to note that these same institutions fail to implement the legal frameworks prescribed by both the Republic of Serbia and the European Community. For example, the National Council of the Roma National Minority's website offers content and necessary information only in the Serbian language despite Romani being the language of the National Council's website.³² The National Council of the Roma National Minority (as well as other national minority councils) has been assigned numerous responsibilities in the field of the official use of language and writing, one of which is to determine "the traditional names of local self-government units, settlements and other geographical names in the language of the national minority if the language of the national minority is in official use in the area of the local self-government unit or settlement, and the names determined by the national council will then be introduced into official use in addition to the names in the Serbian language" (Bašić 2018, 17). However, it should be noted that the Romani language is not recognised as an official language in any community in Serbia, and therefore, the names of streets and settlements, road signs and the like have not been translated into Romani.

Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Serbia has 25 ministries, of which only the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure (MCTI) offers content translated into Romani,³³ meaning that with the exception of Romani, Serbian (the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets) and English, no other national minority language is provided. Some ministries translate content into English, but no other ministry, apart from the aforementioned MCTI, has content in any of the national minority languages used in Serbia. What is particularly surprising is the failure of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, as the umbrella institution for the implementation of the rights of national minorities, to provide content in any of the languages of national minorities, choosing instead to limit the information it provides in the Serbian language only (Cyrillic and Latin alphabet).³⁴ Although the visibility of Romani on the MCTI website is an example of good practice in the implementation of laws and regulations, the criteria for choosing this particular ministry as opposed to any other for the inclusion of Romani in the website's

³² The National Council of the Roma National Minority website is available at: <https://romskinacionalnisavet.org.rs/rom/> with the 'Romani language' option (accessed on 21/4/2023).

³³ The website of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure in the Romani language is available at: <https://www.mgsi.gov.rs/rom> (accessed on 21/4/2023).

³⁴ The website of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue is available at: <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/> (accessed on 21/4/2023).

visual presentation is not entirely clear. As a national minority, a socially vulnerable, marginalised and stigmatised community, as well as a community often discriminated against, the members of the Roma population would presumably require information in their own language in the presentations of many other ministries, as well as many other relevant institutions.

4.4. *Different types of inscriptions in the Serbian public space*

Inscriptions in the Romani language in the Serbian public space belong to the top-down level of language use because they are part of strategic state or local self-government policies. As previously mentioned, although Romani can be “seen” on the Internet sites of radio and television channels which broadcast programmes in Romani as well as selected Internet presentations, signs in Romani in public spaces are hardly to be seen at all.

This chapter will focus on the inscriptions intended for the Roma population (in Serbian and Romani), documented in the field research carried out by the researchers from the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA.³⁵ Since they represent inscriptions of public importance, initiated by institutions of local self-government, they can be seen as elements of the top-down level of the use of the Romani language.

Part of the photo-documentation analysed here was collected during field research in the city of Knjaževac and the surrounding area. According to the 2011 Census, in the municipality of Knjaževac, 789 residents declared themselves as Roma, while 673 residents stated that their mother tongue was Romani.³⁶ The data from the 2011 Census and the 2022 Census for the municipality of Knjaževac differ to the extent that in the last Census (2022) only 680 residents declared themselves as Roma. While it is not currently possible to discuss the reasons for the dramatic drop in the number of Roma in the municipality of Knjaževac, the reduction in their number may be a consequence of continued stigmatisation, a lower percentage of Roma ethnicity, frequent migration, and the like. In the city of Knjaževac, one part of the Roma community live in a special Roma settlement (Roma mahala), separated from the city centre, while the other part are integrated into the majority Serbian population and reside in the urban area of the city. In the village of Minićevo, which is located near the town of Knjaževac, the Roma population are integrated into the majority population, i.e. they do not inhabit a separate and isolated settlement. The Roma

³⁵ All photographs were archived in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA.

³⁶ According to unofficial data, the number of Roma in the territory of the municipality of Knjaževac is approximately 1,500.



Image 1: Inscription in a Roma settlement in Knjaževac

in the municipality of Knjaževac are bilingual so they are equally proficient in Serbian and Romani.

The photographs referred to in this place are documented in the Roma settlement in Knjaževac, where the majority of the city's Roma live. In 2016, on one of the Roma houses, the inscription DEČJI KLUB ROMA (Roma Children's Club) was recorded in the Serbian language and Cyrillic script (Image 1). The same photograph includes another inscription (the photo is not clear enough to see) OD 1.7.2015. POČINJE OBDANIŠTE SA RADOM (The kindergarten starts working from 1.7.2015) in the Serbian language and Latin script.

Based on the content of the inscription, it can be concluded that in 2015 the house was intended to be used as a kindergarten for the Roma children from the settlement, and it can be assumed that the opening of the kindergarten was either a local self-government initiative or part of another local project. Details about the work of the kindergarten are not known (such as the number of children, who initiated the opening of the kindergarten, etc.). All that is known is that in 2016, when the field research was carried out and when the photograph was documented, the kindergarten was no longer working. Considering that the inscription is written in Serbian, using both Cyrillic and Latin scripts, the photograph testifies to the (non)use of the Romani language as well as its definitive invisibility in researched community. The project which was clearly intended for Roma children and the Roma population involving a house in a Roma settle-

Image 2: Inscription
 “Be a foster family”
 (Aven dujto familia)
 in front of the Pančevo Town Hall



ment which had been selected as the location for a kindergarten, as well as the inscriptions themselves, which contain important information intended for the target group, disregard the language of the community for which the entire initiative was intended, thus designating Romani as one of lower prestige. The time span from 2015 to 2016, when the kindergarten was operational, shows a time-limited initiative, which either failed to flourish in the local Roma community or was not supported by further funding.

In Knjaževac and its surroundings, the local library – the National Library “Njegoš” – works actively and intensively to promote Romani, organising workshops for Roma children several times a year, and in several elementary schools in Knjaževac and its surroundings, optional classes are held in the subject *Romani language with elements of national culture* (Mirić 2019a; 2021a).

Six years later, in field research on the visibility of different languages in multilingual border regions, conducted within the *Semiotic Landscapes of Multilingual Border Regions* project,³⁷ only one inscription in Romani was docu-

³⁷ This is a bilateral project carried out by the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA and the “Friedrich Schiller” University Jena, which in the period from 2022 to 2024 is financed by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

mented in the city of Pančevo, representing a rare example of the use of Romani in the public space and on official signage. Pančevo is a multi-ethnic and multilingual city, where the Serbian, Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak and Macedonian languages are in official use and the signs on public sector buildings are written in the official languages. Although the Roma are the fourth largest national minority according to the census, the Romani language is not in official use. On the inscription cited and analysed here, Romani is used alongside the Serbian, Hungarian, Romanian, Macedonian, Russian and Slovak languages (in the official script of each of the mentioned languages) in a call for citizens to offer foster care, published by the Centre for Social Work (Image 2).

The photograph shows AVEN DUJTO FAMILIA written in Romani, in the Latin script (translation (literal): Be second family). Since there are no inscriptions in other parts of the city – either official or unofficial (or the researchers did not observe any other inscriptions during their research) it can be concluded that the functional message of this particular inscription takes precedence over the official use of language in the public space. In practice, it has been shown that Roma families are often foster families, hence the appearance of Romani on the mentioned inscription.

Both of the mentioned inscriptions have a functional use, with the first inscription (the inscription in the Roma settlement in Knjaževac) being in the Serbian language, while the second (the inscription in Pančevo) is in Romani. The initiators of both inscriptions are local institutions. The inscription in the Roma settlement in Knjaževac was probably initiated by a local non-governmental organisation or one of the institutions within the local self-government, while the second inscription was initiated by the Centre for Social Work and the “Duga” Foster Care Association. Although these institutions can be viewed as official institutions, it seems that the functionality of the content of the inscriptions, and therefore the use or non-use of Romani in the inscriptions, and not its official use, takes priority over the status of Romani itself. In addition, the use of Romani in Pančevo, and the non-use in the Romani settlement in Knjaževac may indicate the practice of multilingualism in the settlements where the inscriptions were located. Knjaževac is a monolingual town, without any official practice of using Romani, while the town of Pančevo is officially multilingual, and the use of Romani, although not in official use, is an indicator of the practice of multilingual inscriptions and writing in different languages. Furthermore, in 2015, when the inscription was placed in the Roma settlement in Knjaževac, there were still no classes in Romani, and the Roma population itself was not aware of the possibility of signs being written in Romani. The question also arises as to whether the Roma community was even involved in the implementation of the project to open a kindergarten in this Roma settlement. Pančevo, on the other hand, belongs to the area (Vojvodina) where education in Romani

exists, and therefore the appearance of Romani on an official inscription should not be considered unusual.

5. *The bottom-up level and use of the Romani language in the linguistic landscape in Serbia – field research*

An examination of various legal frameworks, such as the top-down level of language use, whose goal, but also obligation, are to include the Romani language as a national minority language, and to promote the visibility of Romani and the Romani community in the public space in Serbia, indicates only the partial implementation of relevant laws and the realization of the Roma's linguistic rights. The analysis of the domains of use of Romani provided for in the *Charter on Regional or Minority Languages* and the *Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts* showed that Romani is nominally included in those domains anticipated in both the *Charter* and the *Law*, but that the real situation in Serbia is significantly more complex, and more should be done to insist and work on an even more intense visibility of Romani, especially considering the status of the members of this community in Serbian society. It can be assumed that the greater visibility of the Roma community and their language would promote intercultural, multilingual and multiethnic tolerance, especially when it comes to the Roma.

It is crucial to conduct research on the visibility of Romani in the Serbian public space and its linguistic landscape at the bottom-up level, as the level of language use in the public space based on the initiatives of individuals and informal groups. Bearing in mind the dispersion of the Roma community, as well as the heterogeneity of Romani in terms of the existence of different Roma varieties on the territory of Serbia, such studies require a systematic approach, on the one hand, and human resources, which the scientific community in Serbia does not have access to in sufficient amounts, on the other. In various field studies of Roma communities and the Romani language on the territory of Serbia in the period from 2016 to today, material which only partially shows the visibility of Romani in Serbia has been documented, i.e. although it represents a solid methodological and theoretical basis for further research, it does not prove the visibility of this minority language.

The material was documented in several projects, from 2010 to 2023, involving the researchers from the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, and for the purposes of analysing the visibility of Romani, it will be divided into 1) sacral inscriptions; 2) funerary inscriptions, or inscriptions on tombstones. The photo-documentation method was applied in the collection of this material, and the photographs were archived in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA. Inscriptions of both types belong to the bottom-up level of

language use because they were created and are visible thanks to the initiatives of individuals and/or informal Roma groups (societies, associations, etc.). The photo-documented inscriptions in Romani will be accompanied by a discussion of the preliminary results obtained from a pilot sociolinguistic questionnaire in several Romani communities on the territory of Serbia, which was created for the purposes of researching the vulnerability of different languages in Serbia as part of the VLingS project of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA.

5.1. *Inscriptions on sacred monuments*

There are very few differences between Roma traditional culture, especially Orthodox-Christian, and the traditional culture of the majority Serbian population of the same confessional affiliation. Therefore, the traditional holidays, the rituals practiced during the celebration of the traditional holidays and the elements of the rituals are largely the same. However, in some Roma communities, a holiday dedicated to the non-canonised Roma saint (Aunty) Bibija is celebrated. This feast day is celebrated only by Roma of the Orthodox faith, in the area south of the Sava and Danube, and north of Niš. It is important to note that the date of the celebration dedicated to Bibija differs among various Roma communities in the territories where it exists. In some communities, it is linked to Easter, which is why the holiday is a movable feast, or it is linked to a specific date – January 31 (Ćirković 2021).³⁸

Several monuments dedicated to Bibija have been documented in field research to date. The monument in the Belgrade Roma settlement of Orlovsko naselje was documented in 2010 (Image 3), the monument in the vicinity of Knjaževac was documented in 2016 (Image 4) and the monument in Vlaško Polje in 2018 (Image 5). All the monuments were erected on the initiative of the local communities (and possibly individuals) where the monuments are located. This would mean that the inhabitants of the aforementioned settlements created both the monuments and the inscriptions on them themselves.

The iconography on the monuments is completely different. On the monument in the Orlovsko settlement (Image 3) there is a reproduction of the classic icon of Aunty Bibija, which is considered to be the work of P. Daničić (Ćirković 2021, 123), while a reproduction of the icon of Saint Paraskeva of the Balkans is found on the monument in Vlaško Polje (Image 5). Apart from the cross at the top, the monument in the vicinity of Knjaževac (Image 4) has no other iconography, but only an inscription.

³⁸ The settlements mapped according to the date of the celebration of the holiday dedicated to Bibija can be found at: <https://rm.coe.int/factsheets-on-romani-culture-2-5-bibi-and-bibijako-djive-in-serbia/1680aac380> (accessed on 24/4/2023).

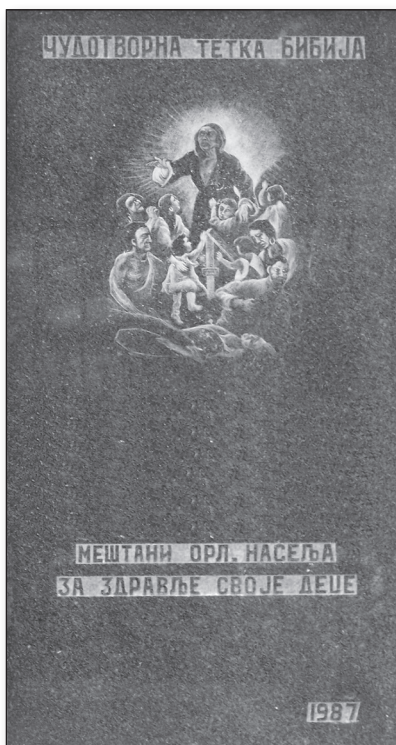


Image 3:
Monument to Aunt Bibija in the Orlovska settlement in Belgrade (top, left)

Image 4:
Monument to Aunt Bibija in Knjaževac (top, right)

Image 5:
Monument to Aunt Bibija in Vlaško Polje (left)

The monument in Orlovsko naselje (Image 3) includes an inscription in the Serbian language, in the Cyrillic script:

Serbian	English
ЧУДОТВОРНА ТЕТКА БИБИЈА.	The miracle worker Aunt Bibija
МЕШТАНИ ОРЛ. НАСЕЉА ЗА ЗДРАВЉЕ СВОЈЕ ДЕЦЕ.	The residents of the Orl. Settlement for the health of their children

Image 3: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

The monument in Vlaško Polje (Image 5) also contains an inscription in the Romani and Serbian languages (both written in the Latin script) below the reproduced icon of Saint Paraskeva of the Balkans:

Romani	Serbian	English
БАХТАЛИ Е ВИБИ		Happy Bibija
	SREĆNA BIBIЈАКА	

Image 4: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

Unlike these two monuments, the inscription on the monument in the vicinity of Knjaževac (Image 4) contains the date when the holiday is celebrated (January 31), the year the monument was erected, (2009), and the text:

Romani	English
БАХТАЛО БИБИЈАКО ЂИВЕ	Happy Aunt's day

Image 5: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

The listed sacred monuments provide valuable documentary evidence of the initiatives of local Roma communities to mark the elements of their identity – the celebration of this Roma feast day is important in those communities where it is celebrated, although not all communities have sacred landmarks in the form of monuments. In addition, the inscriptions also affirm language as a marker of identity. The variations in the Romani language on the inscriptions on these sacred monuments are completely understandable and expected. This can be seen in the script (the standardised Romani script is the Latin alphabet, which also contains graphemes for specific aspirated sounds in the Romani language, e.g. *kh*, *čh*, *čh*, etc., while the inscription on the monument in the vicinity of Knjaževac (Image 4) is in the Cyrillic script), as well as in certain linguistic elements (e.g. on the inscription on the monument in Vlaško Polje (Image 5) *bahtalo* is written instead of *baxtalo* – i.e. instead of the grapheme for the velar fricative *x*, the grapheme of the classic Latin script *h* is used). Fluctuations in the writing of the Romani language are also observed in other domains of the use

of the Romani language, both informal – in conversations on various internet platforms (Leggio & Matras 2017), and official – in classes, for example, but also in texts published in Romani.

What can be said for certain is that regardless of the lack of education in the Romani language and literacy in the mother tongue of the native speakers of Romani, its stigmatisation and lower prestige compared to the official Serbian language, in some Roma communities there is an awareness among the speakers of Romani that it can be written (Images 4 and 5). Despite the rudimentary nature of the text, the inscriptions indicate that there are readers of those inscriptions since they are written in Cyrillic and Latin scripts which do not differ from the scripts in Serbia (both scripts are in official use). Literate readers thus receive and understand the message contained in the text of the inscription.

5.2. *Funerary inscriptions or tombstone inscriptions*

Numerous research studies in Serbia have been dedicated to inscriptions on tombstones to date (see chapter 1.1.). These mainly deal with minority and/or endangered languages, so the importance of such research is great. Roma tombstones are difficult to identify as the names and surnames of the deceased or those who erected the monuments are often identical to Serbian names and surnames. They can therefore only be distinguished according to confessional affiliation as Roma Orthodox Christians have names and surnames typical of Serbian Orthodox Christians, while Roma Muslims most often have Muslim names and surnames. In addition, members of the Roma community are buried in officially established cemeteries, and are not separated within the cemetery area. Field research carried out to date, including the photo-documentation of tombstones, has not yielded materials which would indicate the existence of inscriptions on tombstones in the Romani language. The only exception are the recently documented tombstones at the Zbeg cemetery in the neighbourhood of the Borča settlement on the outskirts of Belgrade, which currently represents the only corpus of inscriptions on tombstones in Romani.³⁹

At the Zbeg cemetery in the Belgrade neighbourhood of Borča, the documented tombstones with inscriptions in Romani belong to Romani Muslims. The names and surnames of the deceased, as well as their relatives who erected

³⁹ This discovery was made by my colleague Snežana Stanković, a postdoctoral student at the “Friedrich Schiller” University Jena (Germany), who during her research observed inscriptions in Romani, documenting a few of them. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my colleague Snežana Stanković, who shared her knowledge and sent several documented photographs of these tombstones with inscriptions in the Romani language, which were accompanied by a systematic photo-documentation of the tombstones at the Zbeg cemetery in Borča.

the monuments, are Muslim. The Muslim monuments in this cemetery are visually noticeable. They are made of white stone and bear symbols of Islam (the crescent moon with a star). The term *nišan* is used for Muslim tombstones, and this term is also used on some of the inscriptions, although the term for 'monument' varies, as the material itself will show. There are no inscriptions in Romani on the monuments of Romani Christians, although it is not possible to identify in any way which Christian monuments are Romani and which are not. The case with the Muslim monuments is similar as only those with an inscription in Romani can be reliably claimed to belong to the Roma. The rest of the Muslim monuments cannot be claimed to be Romani without delving deeper into the demographic and ethnic composition of the inhabitants of the Borča settlement, which will not be included in this study.

The corpus of tombstones with inscriptions in Romani comprises 13 tombstones.⁴⁰ The earliest dated monument with an inscription in Romani bears the year 2007. In addition to inscriptions in Romani, the monuments also include the names and surnames of the deceased (as well as the names of those relatives who share the burial place and the monument), the year of birth and the year of death, and some monuments also bear photographs of the deceased.⁴¹ What can be noted on the largest number of tombstones is Al-Fatiha, the first surah of the Quran.⁴² On all the monuments where it is found in the form of an inscription, it is written in the Latin script, transliterated from the Arabic language.⁴³ From all 13 monuments with inscriptions in Romani, two are written in the Cyrillic (e.g. Image 6), while the rest are in the Latin script (e.g. Image 7). The inscriptions in Romani on the tombstones are mostly "technical" in nature ("Tombstone erected by ...") (Huțanu&Sorescu-Marinković 2016, 34) (Images 6 and 7).

Romani	English
О БАР ВАЗДЕНА	Headstone erected
О ДАД И ДАЈ О ПЕЊА ЕМ О ПРАЛ	Father, mother, sisters and brother

Image 6: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

⁴⁰ All other monuments, if they have inscriptions, are in Serbian, and one of them has an inscription in the Albanian language.

⁴¹ The canonical and non-canonical elements of tombstones will not be discussed here as that is beyond the topic and scope of this paper.

⁴² Al-Fatiha consists of seven verses, in which a request is made to Allah for guidance and protection from evil.

⁴³ Since the analysis of the Arabic text will not be the subject of the analysis of this paper, the texts of Al-Fatiha, their authentic transliteration and the variability of the orthography will not be discussed further.



Image 6:
Tombstone in the Zbeg Cemetery in Borča

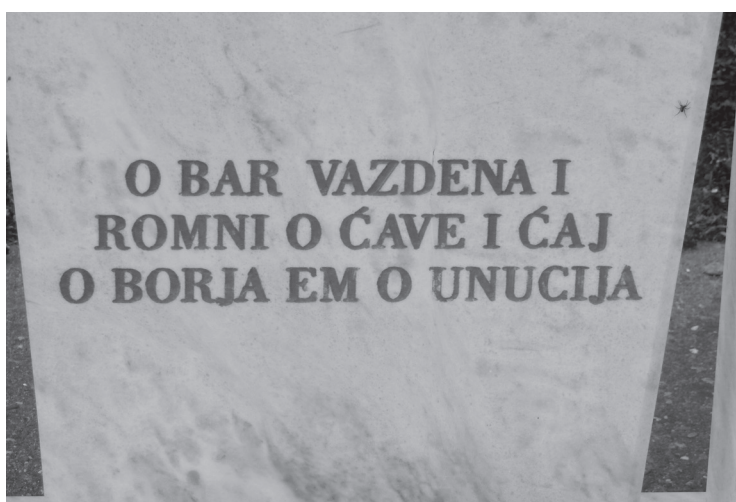


Image 7: Tombstone in the Zbeg Cemetery in Borča

Romani	English
O BAR VAZDENA I	Headstone erected
ROMNI O ĆAVE I ĆAJ	wife, sons and daughter
O BORJA EM O UNUCIJA	daughter-in-law and grandchildren

Image 7: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

Two inscriptions have a slightly different content, i.e. the inscriptions are not of a “technical” nature (Images 8 and 9).

The inscription in Image 8 contains a formula which expresses the wish for Allah to send the deceased to paradise⁴⁴

Romani	English
ja allah oprostini o grehija sa	[may] Allah forgive all of our sins
e rahmetlijenje hem akalje	to the deceased and to these
dujenje hem te rahmeteja	two and that the deceased
chiv ljen ko dzeneti	go to heaven

Image 8: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

while the inscription in Image 9 contains an emotional statement in both Romani and Serbian:

Romani	Serbian	English
Amari duša		Our soul
Amaro đuli		Our rose
	S ljubavlju najmiliji	With love from your dearest ones

Image 9: Transcription of the inscription in Romani translated into English

On the one hand, the linguistic characteristics of the inscription show that it is an Arli variety of the Romani language,⁴⁵ while on the other hand they demonstrate great variability in the use of terms, orthographic solutions for the sounds of the Romani language, morphological variation and the like. Here, attention will be drawn only to a few linguistic features, while a detailed linguistic analysis of the inscription deserves a separate study.

⁴⁴ The translation of this particular inscription is not literal, but adapted to make the text easier to understand.

⁴⁵ The Muslim Roma, as to be expected, speak the Arli variety of Romani, or another variety belonging to the Balkan branch of Romani dialects.

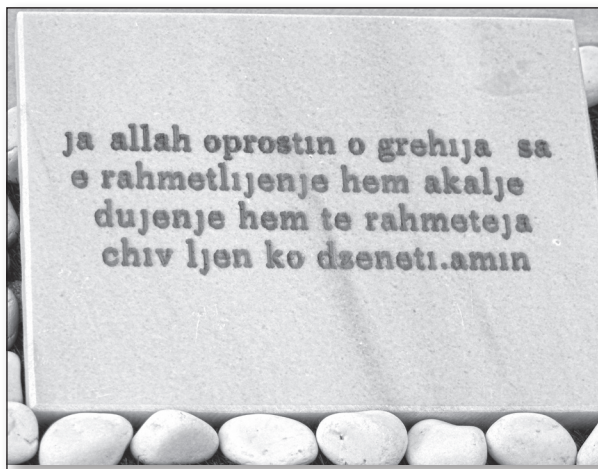


Image 8: Tombstone in the Zbeg Cemetery in Borča



Image 9: Tombstone in the Zbeg Cemetery in Borča

The phonological characteristics of lexemes such as *daj* ‘mother’, *čaj* ‘daughter’, *penja* ‘sisters’, *hem/em* ‘and’, or the morphological characteristics, e.g. *vazdela* ‘erects’ (present singular), *vazdinje* ‘they erected’ (perfect plural) and others all indicate that the Arli dialect was used on the inscriptions.⁴⁶

The variability is noted in the use of the terms for ‘monument’, where *nišani* ‘tombstone/nišan’, *spomeniko* ‘monument’, and *bar* ‘stone’ are used, as well as in orthographic solutions for Romani sounds: *čave* and *čave* (from Romani *čhavo* (sg) and *čhave* (pl)) ‘sons’ and *čaj* (from Romani *čhej/čhaj*) ‘daughter’. The morphological variability is reflected in the borrowed stem of the noun *unuki/unuci/unuc* (from Serbian *unuk* (sg)/*unuci* (pl) ‘grandchild/grandchildren’), while the plural suffix *-ja* retains, e.g. *unukija/unucija/unucja* ‘grandchildren’, *borja/bojra*⁴⁷ ‘daughters-in-law’, as well as in the use of different forms of *vazdel* ‘erect’ – *vzdinđe/vazdinđe* (perfect) ‘they erected’, *vazdela/vazdena* (present) ‘erects.3SG/ erect.3PL’. Such orthographic and morphological variability indicate individual practice in the use of language, as well as individual orthographic interpretation of spoken language.

5.3. *The application of a sociolinguistic questionnaire in researching the use of the Romani language in the linguistic landscape in Serbia*

The use of language in the linguistic landscape, i.e. in the public space, as an important factor in assessing the vitality of a language has not been given adequate attention in studies dealing with this issue. Furthermore, this factor has not been taken into account in the scales used to assess language vitality, and there is no mention of it in the international databases of endangered languages such as UNESCO’s *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*, *Ethnologue*, *Endangered Languages Project*. Bearing in mind previous research on the visibility of minority languages in Serbia, such as Banat-Bulgarian, Vlach, Romanian and others (see chapter 1.1.), as well as the importance of language use in the public space for assessing its vitality and status, the sociolinguistic questionnaire created for the purposes of research into the endangerment/vitality of the languages registered as endangered in Serbia⁴⁸ also includes several questions which examine

⁴⁶ The typical form of the conjunction ‘and’ in Romani is *thaj*, while *hem/em* is borrowed from the Turkish language.

⁴⁷ It concerns the metathesis of the final sound if the noun stem *bori* and the plural suffix *-ja*.

⁴⁸ The sociolinguistic questionnaire was developed by researchers engaged in the Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia (VLingS) project, financed by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia within the IDEA program. For more about the project, see: <https://vlings.rs/> (accessed on 4/26/2023). The questionnaire is universal and uniform for all the investigated languages, only its form differs from language to

the knowledge of native speakers regarding the existence of inscriptions, both public and private, in the investigated languages:

- a) Are there any inscriptions in Romani on/in the buildings of state institutions (health centres, municipalities, schools...)? (if the answer is “yes” – where did you see those inscriptions?)
- b) Are there any official inscriptions in Romani on the streets (e.g. street names, settlements)? (if the answer is “yes” – what kind of inscriptions have you seen, where did you see those inscriptions?)
- c) Have you ever seen any inscriptions in Romani (e.g. inscriptions on monuments, graffiti...)? (if the answer is “yes” – what kind of inscriptions have you seen, where did you see them?)
- d) Are there inscriptions on gravestones in Romani?
- e) Are there inscriptions on your family’s tombstones?

Given that this sociolinguistic questionnaire is the first to examine the most diverse domains of the use of endangered languages, it had an initial pilot version, which for the Romani language was tested by Svetlana Ćirković and Mirjana Mirić in the Romani settlements in Knjaževac, Belgrade (the Mali Mokri Lug and Bežanijska kosa settlements), Bavanište (the Kovin municipality) and Zrenjanin.⁴⁹ A total of 62 pilot sociolinguistic questionnaires were completed for Romani, and the answers to the aforementioned questions show, on the one hand, the uniformity of the answers, i.e. that Romani is not in official use, while, on the other, Romani is partially used in the private sphere. Table 1 shows the results of the questionnaire regarding the visibility of Romani in public spaces.

language, whereby the question for the Romani language is formulated as: *Are there any inscriptions on tombstones in Romani?*, while for Banat-Bulgarian it reads: *Are there any inscriptions on tombstones in Paulician?* For more about creating sociolinguistic questionnaires, see: Sokolovska, Sorescu-Marinković & Mirić (in preparation).

⁴⁹ In the second phase, the questionnaire was reworked based on the experiences of the researchers who carried out field research during 2022 in all the ethnolinguistic communities covered by the VLingS project. The revised sociolinguistic questionnaire, version 2.0, will be applied in research in 2023 in the different Romani communities in Serbia.

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Are there inscriptions in Romani on/in the buildings of state institutions (health centres, municipalities, schools...)?	1	55	6
Are there official inscriptions in Romani on the streets (e.g. street names, settlements)?	0	56	6
Have you ever seen any inscriptions in Romani (e.g. inscriptions on monuments, graffiti...)?	12	47	3
Are there inscriptions on tombstones in Romani?	12	42	8
Are there any inscriptions on your family's tombstones?	2	59	1

Table 1: The results of the applied sociolinguistic questionnaire in the domain of the visibility of the Romani language in the public space.

Out of 62 completed questionnaires, in response to question a) *Are there any inscriptions in Romani on/in the buildings of state institutions (health centres, municipalities, schools...)?* - the answer in 55 cases was "no", in 6 cases "I don't know", while only one answer was "yes". To question b) *Are there any official inscriptions in Romani on the streets (e.g. street names, settlements)?* - 56 research participants answered "no", while 6 participants answered "I don't know". The participants' answers to questions c) and d) are rather thought-provoking, and consequently should provide the stimulus for further research. When asked question c) *Have you ever seen any inscriptions in Romani (e.g. inscriptions on monuments, graffiti...)?* - most of the participants, 47 of them in total answered "no", 3 participants answered "I don't know", while 12 answered "yes". The participants who are aware of the existence of inscriptions in Romani mentioned graffiti and swear-words, which they had seen in public places such as on the walls of buildings, and park benches. A number of participants said that they had seen inscriptions on tombstones, which is a very significant discovery. What is important to note is that those research participants who provided answers regarding the existence of inscriptions in Romani on tombstones, mentioned the Bežanija Cemetery in Belgrade as a place where inscriptions in Romani on tombstones can be found. The question regarding the existence of inscriptions in Romani on tombstones (d) produced answers of the following type - 42 participants in the research indicated "no", 8 answered with "I don't know", while 12 participants answered that inscriptions in Romani on tombstones exist. The Bežanija Cemetery in Belgrade was mentioned again as a cemetery where such inscriptions can be found. The

answers to the last question (f) about the existence of inscriptions in Romani on the tombstones belonging to the respondents' families show that as many as 59 participants claim that there are no inscriptions in Romani on the tombstones in their families, with only one participant answering with "I don't know" and two participants with "yes".

Although there are relatively few answers about the presence and use of Romani on tombstones, the prominent and most frequently cited Bežanija Cemetery in Belgrade remains a place for future research. The prevailing response of "no" to the aforementioned questions, including those examining the usage of Romani within official institution and in the public space, indicates that, based on previous research, Romani is not visible within the public sphere of Serbia.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

In this study, the analysis of the use of the Romani language in the public space and the linguistic landscape in Serbia has raised several important questions concerning both the legally regulated use of this language and its private use in the public space in Serbia, on the one hand, and methodological issues, on the other. The Romani language is only partially visible in the public space in Serbia, despite its use and visibility being guaranteed by the constitution, the laws harmonised with it, and international conventions, just like other minority languages. The analysis of the domains of use of Romani in public spaces ostensibly shows the visibility of Romani. In order to investigate the real picture in more detail, it is necessary to include interviews with the enforcers of the right to use Romani in the research, such as court interpreters, members of parliament, and persons engaged in the National Council of the Romani National Minority. This would provide a clearer picture of whether and to what extent members of the Roma community exercise their right to use Romani in court cases and in the National Assembly, as well as in addressing the National Council for the realisation of the right to use Romani on public signs, given that this body has the authority to initiate such action. In addition, the lack of data on the potential organisation of teaching in Romani for the subject *Romani language with elements of national culture* contributes significantly to the inadequate representation of Romani in this domain. Although the conditions for the use of Romani as a minority language within the public domain and in public spaces are prescribed by laws and conventions, it seems that the implementation of the law in Serbia should be more flexible when it comes to Romani. Given that the attitude of the majority of the population towards the Roma and the Romani language remains discriminatory, and that even today Romani does not enjoy a higher status than in the past prior to the introduction of rights regulated by law, those who are responsible for the visibility of Romani should be more motivated to

advocate for a more tolerant attitude in the application of laws and conventions. Although the bottom-up level of language use depends on individuals and organised groups and their initiatives, it seems that the literacy of native language speakers, as well as the awareness of Romani speakers that they can write in their language, could be a significant factor in the use of Romani in the private sphere, serving to make it much more visible than it is today.

Research into the linguistic landscape as a sociolinguistic subdiscipline shows that the use of language in the public space is an important factor which indicates the status of a language, its vitality, and the attitude of speakers towards their own and other languages, and that research into the linguistic landscape is important for the general sociolinguistic picture of a language. The findings of linguistic landscape research may also serve as the basis for further strategies and concrete steps in language planning and the development of language policies.

The Romani language is still marginalised and stigmatised in Serbia, as well as in European countries in general, even though significant progress has been made in the field of human rights and the rights of national minorities. A realistic picture of the number of Roma and speakers of Romani is not attainable from the analysis of census data, since the census questionnaires do not allow for the declaration of linguistic and ethnic pluralism, which in the case of the Roma would be of great benefit bearing in mind the traditional and continuous bilingualism and multilingualism of the speakers of Romani, mixed marriages between Roma and non-Roma and the like. The top-down level of use of Romani in Serbia shows that the rights to use Romani as a minority are fully applied only in the domain of use in the media, while other domains of use of Romani are highly questionable. Public inscriptions in Romani of different types indicate the predominance of the functional principle, whereby the selective use of Romani on public inscriptions targets the Roma as possible beneficiaries of public strategies (e.g. Romani families as foster families), while failing to facilitate their rights or to address the real-life issues they face. This is clearly shown, among other things, in the unclear criteria for choosing which ministry's website will be translated into Romani, while those ministries which are significantly more important for resolving problems in the Roma communities in Serbia, such as the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and others do not offer content in the Romani language.

The use of the Romani language in the private sphere, which belongs to the bottom-up level of language use, indicates the symbolic function of the language, which, among other things, serves to mark identity. This is particularly evident in the use of Romani on sacral monuments and tombstones, which have so far only been discovered by chance during research. The written Romani

language on sacral monuments and tombstones is characterised by a high degree of variability in orthography, morphology and syntax, as well as in the use of punctuation. Bearing in mind the dispersion of the Roma and the lack of competent personnel within the academic community, research into the use of Romani must be consistently promoted, on the one hand, and systematised, on the other. The first step towards systematic research has been taken by including questions about the visibility and use of Romani in the public space in the sociolinguistic questionnaire, which should be conducted in different Romani communities in Serbia. The results of this questionnaire may serve as the starting point for documenting the written Romani language.

Based on everything mentioned in this paper, it may be concluded that the inclusion of field interviews in field research into the visibility of the Romani language in the public space, as well as on sacral monuments and tombstones, is extremely important, since it provides guidelines for further research, particularly considering the dispersion of Roma communities. Therefore, observing the public space in terms of the use of Romani in it is not sufficient in methodological terms. The application of the sociolinguistic questionnaire, which, among other things, examines the existence of public and private inscriptions in the Romani language has proven to be very important as it provides guidelines for further research.

The census data from 2011 and 2022 show a decrease in the number of Roma in Serbia. Taking into account the percentage of the national minority in the total population, this would mean that 1.98% of Roma in Serbia are currently losing their language rights. Although it is unlikely that such a scenario will actually occur, it should certainly be borne in mind that efforts to work on strengthening the ethnic and linguistic identity of this fragile national minority are of the utmost importance.

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