

University of Pécs
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**Examination of community usage and public
educational status of Romani language
in Hungary**

DOCTORAL THESIS

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1. Introduction

Cumulative interest can be observed towards Hungarian Gypsy languages both in linguistic and pedagogical workshops, intellectual circles and public thinking. Nowadays, when most of the members of the national Gypsy/Roma population¹ consider Hungarian as their mother tongue, the reasons of language change and language losing are thought-provoking. Typically, in Hungarian Gypsy/Roma families mostly grandparents use a type of Roma languages. Grandchildren at best only understand, but do not speak their language.

One important feature of minority identity is the preservation and passing on of their own language, therefore beyond the preservation of habits, traditions, history and celebrations there is a need to cultivate the language.

Nationalities need more help to maintain their language and culture. For this, the support of the state is crucial: not only the normative budgetary support but other legal opportunities, which create the bases of nationality education and the possible scenes of language usage. The task of the government is primarily to create opportunities for certain activities (for example with decisions in

¹ The reason of Gypsy/Roma word usage is that Roma leaders had a wish to standardise the name on international level. They choose 'Roma', because people speaking Romani call themselves Roma. The other reason to have a standard name is to avoid different terms (cigány, gitano, gipsy, stb.) became pejorative. But the situation in Hungary is a bit special because Boyashi Gypsies speak the archaic version of Romanian language; therefore these accept 'Gypsy' term. In Hungarian public life all the three Gypsy groups use Roma word to accommodate to the European word usage.

educational policy regarding school curriculum), secondly the financial support of these activities (financing of devices, workforce and trainings), and at last the development of such governmental politics which encourages the usage and improvement of minority languages (Matras 2007:130).

Romani language, which is used by Olah Gypsies, is spoken and understood in several areas of Europe and the world. On international level more and more linguistic research groups work with planning and development of Romani language. Their activities are mainly in connection with the status, corpus and descriptive grammar of the language, not expanded to the area of education. Hungary has a specific role in minority legislation, because the 13 nationalities in Hungary have legal possibilities on individual and community based language usage, gentilitical education.

Laws and recommendations reaching the area of minority language usage and language teaching in Hungary nowadays demands to think over the following questions in the framework of this dissertation:

- What are the actual possibilities for language usage provided by the minority law? How can the guidelines undertaken in the *European Charta of Regional or Minority Languages* concerning our home be prevailed? How much can be the obligation undertaken be fulfilled? What hinders the success of fundamental language usage rights?

- Where is Gypsy language teaching located, what is the role of it in today's Hungarian educational system and the gentilital educational system?
- What kind of role has language teaching beyond the educational system in Hungary nowadays? How the introduction of the two-level school-leaving exam affect/ed the prestige of Gypsy languages?
- What can the Gypsy/Roma population do to strengthen the status and mediating role of the Gypsy languages with the initiatives of non-governmental organisations?

2. The topic of the dissertation

The aim of this thesis is to examine the language of Hungarian Olah Gypsies, the Romani, primarily on the field of education, paying attention to the language usage of Romani in communities. It reviews those fields which can improve the prestige of the language, either in higher education or through language teaching, language exams and two-level school-leaving exams, also covering the actual questions of language teacher training. Primarily my personal interest gave reasons for the choice of this subject: I already acquired and used the Lovari dialect of Romani in my childhood in my own community.

3. Research methods

The research part of the dissertation introduces three examinations. One of them is aimed at the language usage habits of Roma communities of Baranya County; the other two examines the place and role of Romani language in public education on a national level. Based on the conclusions of my researches short and long term aims were framed, the realisation of these will be incumbent on language professionals and the speakers of Gypsy languages.

4. The structure of the thesis

My dissertation – without the introduction – is structured to seven main parts. After the historical and linguistic presentation of the European and Hungarian Gypsy population the third chapter features the place of language rights in the international and national operative rules of law. The fourth part deals with the Hungarian gentilital education status, then in the forthcoming chapter two of my national researches about the mapping of Romani language teaching status are introduced. In the sixth part I examine the role of Romani language beyond the public educational system, such as the possibilities of language examination, Lovari language final exam, language teacher training, postgraduate course of teachers, and at least – anticipating the closing thoughts – the possibilities of language planning are analysed.

5. About the results of the research

Those using Romani as their mother language in Hungary has increasingly narrower possibilities for communication in their mother language, because language usage is being withdrawn to an informal level.

Both of my educational researches highlights that the number of Romani language books is still few, especially the number of books and workbooks with illustrations for younger elementary students.

We can be sure that Romani language is not between languages judged to extinction, because it reached the level of grammatical setting and the basis of standardisation, and the increasingly expanded versions of bilingual dictionaries. Those keeping their Gypsy/Roma ancestors in mind show huge interest for relearning the mother language determined their old culture. The two Gypsy languages, Boyashi and Romani spoken in Hungary considered by the state individually inspires several non-Roma people to get acquainted with the languages.

The tasks formulated in the treatise impose an increased responsibility on the state, the educational policy specialists, colleagues of the Department of Romany Studies and Sociology of Education, drawn up more widely onto all of the Gypsy/Roma intelligent. On behalf of the completion of these activities there is a need to act as soon as possible, not only on the level of recommendations. This is our common interest and responsibility.

6. Legal background of Gypsy language teaching in Hungary

Several laws and regulations contribute to actuate Hungarian Gypsy language teaching. In the following I review the regulations, laws and modifications between 1993 and 2000, examining their effect on the efficiency of language teaching, and the problems emerged and solved by these. The basis of minority education is the 68.§ (2) paragraph of the Constitution, which ensures education on mother tongue for national and ethnic minorities. After the acceptance of the minority law it was the first time to claim the organization of minority education similar to other minorities. (Pálmainé Orsós, 2008)

The Fundamental law put into force in 2012 placed some modifications regarding the question of language teaching.

The greatest step towards the teaching of Romani language was the modified law of 1993 LXXVII., which – besides other rights – also determines the linguistic laws of minority communities. (Forray, 2000).

The *Recommendations of den Haag* facilitates the establishment of a more effective language teaching. In pursuance of the recommendation, professional teacher training where all subject are taught in the minority language is necessary to run successful language learning programs. (Recommendations of den Haag, 1996. 7.)

The IPS² system resulted transformation of the national educational principle: social close-up was by-passed from minority education. Since 2003 the weekly lesson hours were decreased to two, accordingly blocking became easier and guest teachers can be easily involved into teaching. (Pálmainé Orsós, 2008). This decreased number of lessons makes language acquiring and practicing more difficult.

The regulation of the *European Charta of Regional or Minority Languages* is important on international level that defends the two Hungarian Gypsy languages (Boyashi, Romani) since 2008.

It is an improvement that since the regulation of 100/1997. (IV.13.) it is possible to take final exams from both Gypsy languages – both in intermediate and advanced level.

From 1995 there is an opportunity to take a language exam from Romani language at Eötvös Lóránd University, and since 2001 the Romani language exam is accredited based on the decree of 71/1998. (IV.8.). Romani language is act on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment*.

2 Integration Pedagogical System is an educational institutional network which facilitates integrated teaching of disadvantaged students by using pedagogical methods more widely.

7. Gentilitial education

Gentilitial education has a long standing tradition in our country. Hungary was a multinational state, the rate of nationalities in 1780 reached 70%, and it exceeded the number of Hungarians until the middle of the nineteenth century – naturally between the state borders then.

After the revolution and war of independence in 1848-49 the nationality law of 1868 by József Eötvös shows the importance of this question, and the cultural autonomy of Croatian areas. The main increment of the Law of Eötvös is the insertion of rights, cultural and language possibilities of nationalities onto the national rule of law (Sipos 2002:92-98; Országjelentés 2002).

The public law of the Monarchy affected the growth of Hungarians favourably, which grew 48% from 30% until 1910 – within little more than 100 years. In the first decade at the turn of the century assimilation could be seen, since the total number of Hungarian population increased 8,5%, and within this the number of Hungarians increased with 15% - compared to a survey 10 years before.

59% of the population spoke Hungarian from the almost 20 million denizens in 1900, and then ten years later a survey showed 65% of denizens with Hungarian as their mother tongue. The background of this data is the Law of Aponyi in 1907 (Sipos 2002:186-200).

The effect of Lex Apponyi had a contrary result than the lawmaker intended, pushing the contrast to extremes between Hungarians and nationalities, because in exchange of fastidious it intended the content and mind of education to be Hungarian (Karády 1997:158-159; Huszár 1998:45).

Before 1945 there were rich traditions of nationality researches in Hungary. Contrarily, there was no gentilital politics of the country between 1945 and 1948, hereby the need of researches in this topic did not emerged (Fehér 1993:13).

Between 1948 and 1960 the so-called automatism was typical to t Eastern-Europe and Hungary, and it was persisted until the middle of the 1980s. The principal of automatism said that the question of nationalities would be solved automatically, because in pursuance of the politics of Lenin interests and conflicts of nationalities would be vanished as all members of the nation will have same rights. As an effect there were no individual publications or articles in the topic of nationalities after 1945 (Fehér 1993:13-14).

Reviewing the political literature of this era, we can see that a kind of disputation was operated, where the quantity of 'giving' to non-Hungarian nationalities were discussed – that is how some nationality schools, programs and organisations were remained. (Tilkovszky 1998, Forray 2000, Bindorffer 2010)

Hungarian nationality researches evolved in the 19070s when nationality researches had their renaissance, hereby more people had a need to get acquainted to nationalities living together with them. (Fehér 1993:14-15).

After the modification of the Constitution in 1972 the new Constitution declared the rights of nationalities. At the same time the perception of Gypsy population was unrelieved, it was still not perceived as a nationality, only as a group of the denizens who need educational and financial support for the close up (Forray 2000, Bindorffer 2010).

The so-called 'bridge-role' of nationalities was defined in the 1970s and 1980s which was the development of relationships with neighbour countries. In 1985 Gypsies had the right to establish cultural organisations, National Gypsy Council was established within the Patriotic Popular front and its periodical, the *Romano Nyevipe*.

After the change of the regime, nationalities, minority language communities seemed to be activated.

Examining the content of nationality education we have to see that learning of cultural rules have more important role than in public education. It is the result of a socialisation process, which supports children or students to acquire multiculturalism (Forray 1993:221-234). In this process healthy identity has an important role where individuals can live their status positively, and have some benefit from the process.. (Kozma 2001:56-57; Forray 2001)

Nowadays six nationalities have school system education in Hungary. Bilingual education was refreshed after the transition, but mother language education cannot be strengthened. Nationality kindergartens and schools become more and more popular. These tendencies belong to the language policy processes: when there is a

'hunger' for language learning, majority nationalities stream into minority education if they find an appealing language (from political, social point, etc) (*Országjelentés* 2002).

The state give extra norms for extra assignments, which supports national gentilital education and nationality language teaching. In point of Gypsies two areas can be highlighted:

- Training and education not in Hungarian and Roma minority education.
- Nationality language, bilingual, and language preparatory education,

The introduction of the Gypsy minority language teaching programs in the public education is essential, because the prestige of the language may decrease inside the community and the process of the language exchange and the language losing may speed up. If families think that their language has no values, they are not inspired to transmit their language. In this context the introduction of Romani language teaching programs became really important in educational institutions at the areas mostly populated by Roma.

It is important to make realise in communities and families that they can ask for the introduction of language teaching, they do not need to wait for the educational institutions in this case.

8. Romani language beyond public education

Besides public education there can be other ways of spreading Romani language. I highlight four areas, and with the professional

work out of these the acceptance of this language would be raised to a higher level: the accredited language exam, the two-level school-leaving exam, the network of language schools and the role of nongovernmental organisations.

Accredited language exam: Basic-intermediate- and advanced exams can be taken from Gypsy languages at the Centre for Advanced Language Learning and at Profex Language Examination Centre. At the latter centre the initiation of Romani language exams are in progress and preparatory activities show that in Vác there will be a possibility for taking Romani language exam too.

Romani language exam can be taken at the Centre for Advanced Language Learning since 1995, the accreditation material is connected to József Choli Daróczi and Ervin Karsai. It is important to mention that here all types of Hungarian Romani dialects are accepted. As the Lovari language of the exam differs from the spoken dialect, it is a 'quasi standard' language. Institutionalised standard is not outworked yet but the possible norm will be probably one of the languages of the exams. The opinion of Katalin Ildikó Hegyi is that the standardisation process is reverse, standard came from the examinations and not oppositely. (Hegyi 2010:110). From the point of the prestige of Gypsy languages it is important that language learners have a possibility to choose from increasingly more language centres.

Two-level final exam: This system is introduced since the 2004/2005 school year. In this new system final exams and entrance exams to higher education are contracted, where the entrance part is

to be strengthened at the advanced level. A successful advanced exam means extra point at application to higher education.

The introduction of this new final examination system is a huge improvement so as there is a possibility to take exams in Boyashi and Romani languages, and a successful (above 60%) advanced exam is considered as an intermediate (B2) complex language exam such a sin case of other languages.

Based on the documents of the Educational Authority it can be said that the number of students taking advanced Lovari language final exam is increasing in every year, which shows the increasing popularity of this language. The number of those examinees who take Lovari language exams as additional exams is also higher. It is important from the point of the language prestige that Roma and non-Roma students take final exam and language exam in Romani more often.

Language schools: Popularity of Gypsy languages is unbroken though institutionalisation of this language education is practically new. There is a possibility to learn Gypsy languages in separate levels. Individual learning and small groups are popular and more universities organise courses, thank to that Gypsy language exams are accepted as a criteria for the degree.

My experiences show that students mainly choose Romani language because it is spread that this language is easy and its vocabulary is short It is a fact that there are Hungarian words which have no expedience in Romani because the lack of neology, therefore I think it is not easier to learn this language than any other.

Several students I taught confessed that the grammar of this language is much more difficult than they thought

Non-governmental organisations: Khetanipe for the Roma Unity Association undertook – besides other activities - the preservation of Gypsy/Roma culture and traditions, language cultivation at the beginning and support the inspiration of undertaking identity. Language usage is important for the Association in everyday work. The word 'khetanipe' is also showing our commitment to the language, it means 'joining forces'. We are trying to use Lovari dialect in case of a tender, when we have to find a highly effective, telling name for our project. Romani and Boyashi language learning were available in our study rooms and summer camps, which was popular among the youth. We often have partner organisations or governmental organisations asking to help in translating a text from Romani to Hungarian or the other way. The activities of our Association shows that if we create communication fields to us and believe that Gypsy languages have a place in every field of our lives, then our communities believe that there is a needs to acquire the language in primarily social circumstances – and maybe this is the most important – and the language can get back its values.

9. Language planning – possibilities and assignments in the future

Romani language is only one from the languages in the world which has no denizen tradition and a standard written version. The lack of the standard and the high variance can suggest that Romani is not an individual language. Actually most of the European languages have several dialects, and the differences between the dialects of Romani language are not unusual. The absence of the standard variation of the language serving communication between regions does not mean that we have no variation – being more obvious than others - for the official/written language for public usage (Matras 2007:131).

Romani language did not subject to the process of corpus planning, accordingly mother language or bilingual education is difficult. The execution of neologism may end in failure, because it had to be started decades earlier to be integrated into communication by speakers of the language.

To protect Romani language rights there is a need to develop a Romani curriculum and media such as the training of teachers and scribal. However it is not possible because of the absence of a written standard. (Matras 2007:131). Gypsy language planning and teaching shows initiate problems: a clear-cut regional comparative scientific linguistics research did not come into existence. There is no cooperation in the exchange of the educational materials between single member states because of the deficiency of these. There is no common linguistic- and language teacher professional development. Partly these are the assignments of the currently forming, organised Romani and Boyashi language workshops at the University of Pécs,

Faculty of Humanities, Department of Romany Studies and Sociology of Education, with the professional leading of Anna Orsós linguist. The Department established the Linguistic Workshop within the Romology Research Centre to respond the actual questions of the two Hungarian Gypsy languages, Romani and Boyashi. The aim of the Language Workshop:

„implementing those corpus planning tasks which supports the language to be qualified for accurate and elaborated expressions; determination of language planning, neologism strategies in the interest of a standard norm, and a development of a lingual stability: on the area of spelling, grammatical and pronunciation rules equally; forming Boyashi and Romani language consciously, determine vocabulary enrichment and modifications” (part from the publication of the Romology Research Centre)

Romani Language Workshop determined its concrete task in 2012 a Hungarian Romani language atlas aiming to reinterpret the division of dialects by Kamill Erdős in 1959 and to discover the current relation of dialects.

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