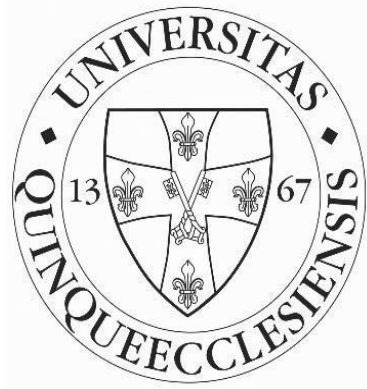University of Pécs

'Education and Society' Doctoral School of Education

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Languages and cultural symbols of the Hungarian Roma Nationality in the Linguistic Landscape of Roma Nationality Schools in Hungary

DOCTORAL THESIS

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I. Description of the topic, aim of the dissertation

The dissertation examines the linguistic landscape of schools providing Roma nationality education in Hungary. A key issue for the culture of the Roma ethnicity in Hungary, and for the survival and prestige of the Boyash and Romani languages, is whether these languages are visually or orally present in the formal spaces accepted by the majority society, such as the various learning and teaching spaces, and in the linguistic landscape of a given locality.

"The most commonly cited definition of the linguistic landscape (Lingusitic Landscape, i.e. visual language use) in the literature is that of Landry and Bourhis (1997:25), who define it as "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. The linguistic landscape of an area has two basic functions: informational and symbolic" (Landry and Bourhis) The basic function of the linguistic landscape, formulated by Landry-Bourhis as "informational and symbolic function", is translated in Hungarian research as "communicative and symbolic function" (Szoták, 2018, Csernicskó, 2018), "informational and symbolic function" (Szoták, 2016), "communicative and symbolic dimension" (Borbély, 2020), "informational and symbolic function" (Laihonen, 1997). This research uses the terms "informational and symbolic function".

The informational function of the linguistic landscape, according to Landry and Bourhis, is that the language of the signs (road signs, building signs, danger signs, advertising texts, etc.) in a given space demarcates the boundaries of the geographical area inhabited by a given linguistic community, and before the visitor has even spoken to the people living in that area, he or she is already informed about the 'power relations' between the linguistic communities living in that geographical space.

Symbolic function is approached from the perspective of the speakers of the language. The presence or absence of a language in a given linguistic landscape may influence the linguistic community of that language. The presence of an otherwise minority language in a given linguistic landscape may indicate the linguistic vitality and social acceptance of that language group, while the absence of a language may indicate that it does not have the same value in that social context as the other (or other) languages present.

The *schoolscape* takes a narrower view of the linguistic landscape of the school environment, i.e. the language of the signs and symbols on the bulletin boards, in the

corridors and classrooms of schools, the language of the daily menu, the names of the rooms, etc.

A significant number of educational policy and educational sociological studies have been carried out in recent decades on the Roma ethnicity in Hungary, their schooling situation and the teaching of ethnic-related content (ethnology, Boyash language, Romani language), and the number of such studies is constantly growing. The aim of this dissertation and related research is to examine Roma nationality education in Hungary from a new perspective, that of the visual content of Roma nationality education in schools. "Examining the linguistic landscape of educational institutions can help us to gain a deeper understanding of the processes taking place in schools, which can be a useful addition to research on education and training." (Gorter and Cenoz, 2015:2)

II. Summary of the research work and thesis statements

II.I. Structure of the dissertation

The introductory part of the dissertation starts with an introduction of the topic, its purpose and its place in the scientific and methodological context, and presents the topicality and novelty of the subject.

The chapter entitled *Theoretical Framework* summarizes the situation of the languages of the Roma in Hungary and the changes in educational policy related to the Roma in Hungary, especially their languages, through examples, and presents the linguistic phenomena affecting the Boyah and Romani languages.

The chapter introducing the research begins with a detailed description of the concept of the linguistic landscape, divided into the following four main units:

1. linguistic landscape concept and background linguistic landscape research
2. a brief description of the linguistic landscape research that has been carried out before the present research on the languages of Boyash and Romani
3. the concept of schoolscape
4. identification of conceptual frameworks that can be adapted to the present dissertation and research based on previous literature and research.

This is followed by a brief presentation of the pilot research that preceded the research and a description of the data collected from the full questionnaire survey and interviews.

The paper will present the results in the light of the hypotheses and research questions and, following a SWOT analysis of the research, will formulate further research directions.

II.2. The research sample and research methods

The sample for the questionnaire survey was based on the list of institutions requested from the Educational Authority (Oktatási HIvatal) in 2020 on the institutions providing national minority language education (Boyash and/or Romani languages) in the 2019/2020 school year, and on the institutions providing Hungarian-language Roma nationality education.

data source	method	goals
● the situation of the Roma nationality and their languages in Hungary ● concepts of linguistic phenomena related to the Boyash and Romani languages ● preliminary research on linguistic landscapes and linguistic landscapes in schools, and the concepts, definitions and categorisations defined in the course of such research	desk research, literature review, collation of data from secondary sources	organizing and adapting data collected at an earlier stage for other purposes related to the research topic, in line with the current research objectives
Institutions providing Roma nationality education in the 2018/2019 academic year (headmaster or teacher of Roma ethnology, or teacher of Romani or Boyash language)	(online) questionnaire	●Comprehensive data collection on the situation of Roma nationality education in Hungary ●a comprehensive picture of the schoolscape of schools running Roma nationality education ●selection of institutions for semi-structured interviews on the basis of the data received
institutions	semi-structured interview	●collecting additional data to the questionnaire data

(head teacher or teacher of Romani or Beás language)		● collection of photo documentation
● interviews ● photos taken in institutions (pilot research) ● photos received from institutions ● photos published online by institutions	content analysis	● to obtain answers to research questions by supplementing the questionnaire data (the photo documentation of the school language landscape is not subject to content analysis, but only to categorisation)

II.3. Results of the research in the light of the hypotheses and research questions

Hypotheses

H1: *All the institutions providing education for the Gypsy minority have a visual element related to the Roma culture, as well as a sign in Beás and/or Romani, because the schools consider it important to inform the users and visitors of the school about the nationality education provided in the school, as declared in the pedagogical programme.*

Overall, Gypsy ethnicity education is neither a guarantee nor a condition for the presence of Beca-Romanic inscriptions and symbols and visual elements related to the culture of the Roma ethnicity in the linguistic landscape of a given school. Furthermore, even if symbols and/or inscriptions appear in a given school, they are not necessarily or exclusively intended to show the nationality of that school.

H2: *In any case, schools that teach Boyash and/or Romani languages should display signage at least in the language(s) taught in the institution, so that it is clear to users and visitors which national language(s) are taught and to raise the profile of these languages.*

Not all schools where languages are taught have signage for the language(s) taught, but just because a school does not teach a language does not mean that it does not have signage for any of them. And the purpose of the display of signs is not necessarily to raise the prestige of the languages and not necessarily to inform the users and visitors of the school about the languages taught there, but mostly to promote the identity of Romastudents.

H3: *The visual elements related to the Roma culture, as well as the signage in Boyash and Romani language displayed in the schools are produced with the involvement of students*

studying in Roma nationality education programme and Boyash or Romani language in connection with Roma national education, as parents have submitted a written request for the launch of the programme and/or their child's participation in national education based on a decision taken together with their children.

The results of the research refute this assumption and show that it is mostly the school administration that takes the initiative to display signs in the Boyash and/or Romani languages, as well as symbols and visual elements related to the culture of the Roma nationality, primarily with the aim of strengthening the identity of Roma children of Roma origin.

Research questions

1. Do symbols and inscriptions appear together in particular institutions?

Symbols and inscriptions do not necessarily appear together, but where there are inscriptions in the Boyash or Romani languages, there are always other visual elements related to the culture of the Roma.

2. What symbols and visual elements are used in schools and in what form?

First of all, Roma storybooks and literature books on ethnicity are displayed in most institutions, followed by photos of Roma, famous people of Roma origin and the Roma flag.

3. What are the contents of the signs in the Beás and/or Romani language(s) and in what form are they displayed in schools?

In most of the institutions that display signs in Boyash and/or Romani, greetings and welcome signs are displayed. In addition to greetings, several institutions also display short poems/texts or room signs. Grammar and/or vocabulary boards for language learning are displayed in the fewest number of institutions.

4. What role or impact does the school attribute to the representation of specific linguistic elements and/or symbols?

The main aim of schools is to strengthen the identity of Roma pupils.

II.4. The SWOT analysis of the research

The strength of the research is that it has pioneered further research on the cultural elements of the Roma in Hungary, and it adds a new aspect to the existing research on the linguistic landscape of schooling in the Roma in Hungary, and to the research on the linguistic landscape of Boyash, Romani inscriptions in schools, and to the existing research on Roma nationality education in Hungary.

A weakness of the research is that the database of institutions providing national minority education received from the Education Office is not accurate, so not all registered institutions provide national minority education, as 3 of the 93 institutions that participated in the research did not provide either ethnographic, Romani or Boyash language education.

A threat to the research is that, as there is no other similar research on the representation of cultural elements and languages of the Roma as a pioneering research, methodologically tractable examples of linguistic landscapes and school linguistic landscapes representing inscriptions in other languages and cultural elements of other ethnicities were used as a basis. The special situation of the Roma in Hungary, due to the fact that it has no mother country and is not a linguistically homogeneous ethnic culture, does not allow for a comparison with the results of research on the linguistic landscape of Hungarian-language inscriptions in schools in areas beyond the borders of Hungary or even with the results of research on the linguistic landscape of school inscriptions of other ethnic groups in Hungary.

The main avenues for further research are those outlined in the following section. A further possibility for the research is the practical application of the research, whereby the good practices already implemented could become known between the institutions by linking the institutions participating in the research, and a common horizontal knowledge and experience sharing between the institutions could also begin.

III. Further research directions and proposals

- As in the present research it was up to the people who filled in the questionnaire and those who took/submitted the photos to decide what they consider to be inscriptions and/or symbols, how they categorise them and what purposes they attribute to these inscriptions, symbols and visual elements, therefore, the next research, building on the present one, could be a continuation of the present research by visiting the institutions involved in the present research and comparing, on the basis of the photo

documentation collected by the researchers, whether the elements considered by the researchers as inscriptions, symbols, visual elements are the same as the elements considered as such by the respondents in the present research and their categorisation.

- Further research could be carried out on the issue of minority language education to investigate why, at least in schools teaching the languages, there are no signs in Boyash and Romani.

- The present research included the inscriptions and symbols, visual elements appearing in the physical linguistic landscape of schools, but already during the research, the results of the internet search for information about the schools showed that in the virtual spaces related to the institutions (school websites, community pages) there are many other inscriptions, symbols and visual elements, which could also be the subject of further research.

- Since the results of the present research show that the appearance of Boyash, Romani language signs and symbols and visual elements related to the culture of the Roma ethnicity in the linguistic landscape of schools is mainly part of a top-down initiative, i.e. mostly the initiative of the school management and teachers, further research could be conducted to find out how the students and possibly their families and parents perceive these signs and visual elements. Do they attribute the same identity-affirming role to these signs and visual elements as the schools have in the present research?

III. Conclusions

In order to improve the quality of education for the Gypsy minority in Hungary, as well as the quality of education in the Beas and Romani languages, and to improve the school success of children of the Roma minority in Hungary, there are still many tasks to be solved for the professionals and decision-makers shaping the education and training processes. Whether in the field of ethnic minority education and language teaching or in the field of children's success at school, it is primarily necessary, as research conducted over the past decades has shown, to explore and understand the individual educational processes in order to formulate recommendations for improvement. Examining the linguistic landscape of Gypsy schools in schools can also help to understand these processes in more detail.

Based on the research results of this dissertation, the display of any symbol, visual element or any signage in Gypsy language related to the Roma culture in schools can be considered as positive, as the purpose of displaying these elements in schools is to show the diversity of the school and the diverse cultural background of the students. If, on the other hand, the aim is also to directly strengthen the identity of Roma students, the visual elements, symbols and inscriptions must be the result of a complex process, selected together with the students, and also selected and designed together with the students.

Merely strengthening the identity of Roma students cannot be the goal of either nationality education or the shaping of the linguistic landscape of schools. Although in the course of the research, the aim of representing cultural diversity through the linguistic landscape of schools was in some cases formulated by schools, it is important to underline that, in addition to strengthening the identity of Roma pupils, it is equally (if not more) important to sensitise and educate non-Roma pupils and teachers.

The research also revealed that the linguistic landscape of schools, even if it contains fixed elements in fixed places (e.g. multilingual greetings on the front door for years, pictures painted on the wall of a school corridor, or inscriptions on the stairs, etc.) are in a constant state of flux due to the periodic appearance of inscriptions, symbols and visual elements that appear in the linguistic landscape of the school for a longer or shorter period of time as part of an exhibition or as part of a thematic mural, exhibition or installation linked to a holiday or commemoration.

It is therefore clear that the linguistic landscape of schools is not constant in content, development and appearance, and that the language landscape of schools evolves in different ways and with different content in the light of the hidden curriculum of schools. To the extent that the shaping of the school language landscape is part of a conscious planning process on the part of schools, it can form an important part of the school's hidden curriculum and of the teaching-learning process.

IV. Thesis bibliography

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