

1.2 Roma, Romani, and the challenges of ethnic and linguistic categorisations

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This chapter distances our analytical stance from named languages and focuses on ways of speaking linked to Romani, presenting them as parts of heterogeneous repertoires. We approach Romani ways of speaking in a translanguaging framework in order to challenge traditional alternatives such as characterizing Romani as a “language with a very restricted vocabulary of inherited words” (Boretzky 1989: 357) or a contact variety (“Para-Romani”, Bakker 2020). This chapter argues that the concept of translanguaging, replacing *named language* with the notion of *repertoire* as a starting point, offers an alternative to describing Romani-bound linguistic practices. The chapter also highlights that standardisation attempts of Romani, resulting from prevailing monolingual and standard ideologies in Europe, are ongoing, yet controversial. Hence, it remains problematic to introduce Romani into educational settings, and the introduction of translanguaging-based education offers a more realistic chance for speakers of Romani to enhance their success in school than the introduction of a standardised Romani variety as language of instruction.

1.2.1 On the Roma

Roma cultural and identity politics in Eastern and Central Europe (e.g. Mirga and Gheorghe 1997; Marushiakova and Popov 2001, 2021) often follow groupism-based nation-state patterns, not only in the matter of standardisation, but also in the attempts to create political unity (for a critical overview from an anthropological point of view, cf. Fosztó 2003). Such movements achieve modest results (Barany 2011) and they are challenged by anthropological viewpoints (e.g. Fosztó 2003; Surdu 2016; Law and Kováts 2018), underlining the nationalist roots and the contradictions of such Roma ethnic struggles (for a critical analysis of related debates, see Acton 2018).

In the lack of a defined territory, nation state or a state-like entity, the mainstream groupism-based identity politics (Brubaker 2002, 2004, cf. chapter 1.1.2) becomes particularly problematic, and the socially constructed nature of ethnic categorization (Ladányi and Szelényi 2001) is more striking than in the case of other ethnic groups in Central-Europe. From a groupism perspective, Marushiakova and Popov, for example, define the Roma as an “intergroup ethnic community”, which is “divided into a widespread archipelago of separate groupings, split in various ways into metagroups, groups and subgroups” (2001: 33). By contrast, from an anthropological viewpoint, Stewart argues that Gypsies “who always live immersed inside and dispersed among majority populations and are invariably bi- or multilingual, do not fit the ‘one culture, one territory, one social structure’ model at all” (2013: 417).

Besides ethnicity, the term Roma denotes belonging to a certain social category across Europe and in Hungary. Furthermore, dark skin colour and black hair are frequently connected to the Roma by the majorities and sometimes by the Roma themselves. Social belonging has been connected to poor socioeconomic status, but also to certain occupations or non- or semi-sedentized (peripatic) ways of life (Törzsök 2001; Janko Spreizer 2013; Mirga 1992). Accordingly, questions such as who is a Roma and who can decide who is a Roma are evergreen topics. Both self-identification or classifications by outsiders are based partly on ethnic, racial, social, or habitual criteria, all of which are often linked to issues of stigmatisation (cf. Lucassen 1991). There are studies showing that in times of economic

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crises, members of the most marginalised social groups are seen as Roma a generation later (Nagy 2007, 2015, 2020). There are also examples of the reverse: persons that have reached the living standards of the middle classes often dissociate themselves (and are dissociated) from the Roma in social discourses.

Not everyone who is (self)categorized as a Roma or a Gypsy speaks Romani. In Hungary, Romania and Serbia many people labelled by others as Gypsy are bilingual, speaking the national language and Boyash (in language typological terms described as a variety of Romanian, e.g. Tálos 2001; Landauer 2009), and claim a Boyash identity (Sorescu-Marinković, Kahl, and Sikimić 2021). Since the ethnonym *Roma* is seen as a Romani word for ‘people (the plural of *Rom* ‘man’), Boyash speakers in Hungary label themselves with the ethnonym *cigány* ‘Gypsy’ and not *Roma*. Scientific discourses in Hungary have also adopted this practice and understand *Gypsy* as an umbrella term labelling a larger group than the term *Roma*, including also the Boyash. In addition, many people who are seen as Gypsy/Roma and who also self-identify as Gypsy/Roma, speak neither Romani nor Boyash but the national language. (For an analysis of linguistic ideologies in the scientific classification of Roma, see Bodó 2016: 159–174).

1.2.2 On Romani

Ways of speaking linked to Romani are present in most or all European states and are part of the everyday of millions. Except for small children or socially highly isolated persons, Romani speakers usually follow multilingual practices: besides Romani they speak the majority languages of the region they live in. Their Romani is usually not oriented toward a single prestige variety (standard), and it is often perceived as a language with a high proportion of elements from other languages or a mix containing Romani elements and elements of other languages. Research on mutual linguistic influences between Romani and other languages has a long tradition (Boretzky 1989; Bakker and Courthiade 1991). Para-Romani (Matras 2002: 242–248), following the paradigm of variational linguistics, is “a generic term for a set of contact varieties, in which most of the lexicon is from Romani, but most of the grammatical system is from another language” (Bakker 2020: 353). Secret languages and jargons focusing on lexis are also often associated with Roma and Romani (Matras and Tenser 2020), particularly in Western Europe, however, this subject is not relevant to our context. In Central and Eastern Europe, Roma communities are often socio-linguistically more salient and Romani is considered as a language of its own right, even though many different varieties have been recognized as well as a strong liaison with other languages (Matras, Bakker, and Kyuchukov 1997; Boretzky and Iglá 2005; Bakker and Courthiade 1991; Matras 1995, 1998).

In Hungary, most of the Romani-speaking Roma are called Vlach-Roma and they speak, according to a diachronic approach, several varieties of the Vlach-Romani dialect group with a high proportion of words of Romanian origin (Bakker and Matras 1997: xvii). For speakers at our research site in Tiszavasvári, Hungary, these contact features in the local Romani remain unnoticed. However, the Romani speakers in Tiszavasvári are very much concerned with the frequency and presence of words with a noticeable Hungarian origin. That is, resources due to earlier contacts with Romanian and other languages are seen as parts of the language, as it is understood and constructed by speakers in the present day, but results of recent and ongoing contact with Hungarian is assessed as a loss of the pure form of old Romani (cf. Abercrombie 2018). Despite a wide range of Romani varieties in Hungary, Vlach-Romani (Szalai 2007; Baló 2017) speakers at our research site in Tiszavasvári do not mention any further differentiation regarding their language. Romani speakers at our other Project funded by the European Commission. The information in this publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.

research site in Slovakia, Szímő (Zemné) (the former is the name of the settlement in Slovak, the latter in Hungarian), live in a Hungarian speaking environment (a minority village); they also speak a variety classified as Vlach-Romani. However, these multilingual (Hungarian, Slovak, Romani) speakers use Romani with less noticeable Hungarian influence.

There are attempts of standardisation of Romani in several European states. These have mostly an impact on national or local level. They are conducted by a narrow group of intellectuals and activists, often with civil or academic support (Halwachs 2020) and (in lack of a state or state-like power centre) they are carried out in a decentralized and pluralistic way (Matras 2015). In Hungary for example, there is a possibility to take a school leaving exam or a language proficiency exam in the standardised Romani variety (a Vlach-Romani variety called Lovari). People might make use of this language certificate to fill degree requirements at the university or job search. In any case, most Roma in Hungary usually do not comply with standardisation efforts and the resources they bring. The Roma might be aware of some standardisation attempts, for instance, the Roma at our research sites might have a Romani translation of the Bible or some other printed materials, but their own Romani practices maintain a noticeable distance from standardized forms (cf. Abercrombie 2018).

Due to the lack of institutional use of Romani (such as schools and other social institutions using standardised Romani), Romani speakers do not have an interest to follow standard forms and adapt their ways of speaking to a standard variety (Busch 2012). In the countries where they live, social progress and competitiveness in education is based on the standard variety of the given national language and not a Romani standard. Nevertheless, living in societies shaped by strong monolingual and standard ideologies, Romani speakers are affected to a great extent by standard-language ideologies as well. As a result, speakers perceive their own non-standard Romani practices increasingly as not pure, mixed and therefore less worthy. Centres of standardisation fail to spread standard linguistic forms, but they successfully circulate standard ideologies (Abercrombie 2018). The Roma in Tiszavasvári typically assume that a pure Romani variety exists somewhere else, even if they are not familiar with it. They located this pure variety in discussions in various ways. Some of them linked it to surrounding villages, others to Budapest.

The schooling of Romani speakers provides a typical example of language-based difficulties in the implementation of a just education (New and Kyuchukov 2018). Education takes place Europe-wide in languages other than Romani, as non-standard ways of speaking, let alone practices bounded to more than one language, have no place in European school systems. Romani is not used as the language of instruction (Gažovičová 2012). This situation is a necessary consequence of the controversies around standardisation: in the lack of a standard, Romani cannot be the language of instruction in a way standardized national languages fulfil this role. In the few cases Romani is present in education, it features as a heritage or a foreign language, typically as a by-product of national or local standardisation attempts. In Hungary, Romani was provided in the first decade of this century in a dozen schools as foreign or heritage language (Lakatos Sz. 2012, for a critical analysis see Orsós 2015; Lakatos P. 2018), and the situation did not change significantly since then. As there is no teacher training for Romani teachers, Romani is taught by Roma or non-Roma teachers holding a language certificate and a degree in another field. The few teaching materials in Romani follow an alphabet developed in the Romani standardization project in the 1980s (Choli Daróczi and Feyér 1988; Rostás-Farkas and Karsai 1991, for an analysis, see Heltai 2020 and chapter 3.8.1), containing letters which do not belong to the Hungarian alphabet. Texts based on this standardized orthography are not easily readable for Roma who have learned the Hungarian alphabet at school (Réger 1995: 86). Additionally, authors or

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translators of these materials make use of individual word creations or use words which are part of their local vernacular but unfamiliar to others.

1.2.3 Romani and translanguaging

There are classification attempts of Romani varieties from a language typological perspective, such as scalar-based decoupling of Romani and Para-Romani, as well as a genealogical and a diffusion model to describe a Romani variety spectrum (Bakker and Matras 1997; Matras 2005; Boretzky 2007; Elšík and Benišek 2020: 390). These exploratory models often provide a very detailed, multi-faceted overview of the diversity and stratification of varieties and contact phenomena. However, the contradictions described above underline that Romani, similar to Roma ethnicity, hardly fits into groupism-based categories. Sometimes the theorists themselves, such as Baló (2017) cited below regarding the situation in Hungary stress the difficulty, inconsistency, and imperfection of categorisation:

The classification of Gypsy dialects remains inconsistent in the literature. Dialects are classified on the basis of genetic and geographic diffusion models, both of which have their advantages and disadvantages. (...) The situation is even more complicated with regards to the Hungarian Vlach variants, given that the Roma tribes outlined by Erdős (1959) [Erdős gave the first description of Roma ethnic groups in Hungary, describing these as “tribes” – Heltai], which, in his view, correspond to language varieties, too, are either sporadically documented or not documented at all. The features he describes suggest that some of them form a transition between the Vlach Gypsy and the Central dialect groups. However, more recent data collected by myself show that, because of the type and extent of the variation, both the delineation of the tribes (in case they still exist) and the one-to-one correspondence between groups and language varieties is questionable (Baló 2017: 220–221, translated by János Imre Heltai).

Translanguaging focuses on other issues. It is a concept for both describing human linguistic practices and building pedagogies based on such new perspectives. Translanguaging as a practical theory of language (Li 2018) is an approach to understand the diversity of human speaking without the need to classifying and separating different languages and varieties. Auer (2019: 16) criticises translanguaging scholarship claiming that “disconnected phenomena of language contact and highly diverse bilingual practices are all subsumed under the new term”. In our view, translanguaging is not a substitute for language typological approaches; it does not compete with research on language contact and variation. It is a suitable theoretical framework for understanding speakers’ language practices and the ideologies underpinning them: it allows us to grasp how speakers make use of different linguistic forms, the way they combine, manipulate, and evaluate them (cf., for example, Chapter 3.10 on voice, stylisation and crossing).

Translanguaging as understood in this volume (for the origins, diversity and competing trends in the interpretation of the concept, see chapter 2.3 and 3.4) is a concept based on the assumption that speakers’ repertoires are not divided into named languages: they are unitary (García 2014; Vogel and García 2017); thus, the knowledge about languages and the consciousness about being a mono- bi- or multilingual person is a result of social learning. Languages exist as social facts (Kleyn and García 2019; Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015), but, translanguaging scholarship argues, it is not necessary to assume “a cognitive duality
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corresponding to the social duality” (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2019: 626–627). Further important features of translanguaging include multimodality, that is, human communication including body language and gestures (García and Otheguy, 2020: 25) and the interconnectedness of cognitive systems (Li 2018: 20). This volume addresses the multimodality of learners’ experience in a translanguaging educational environment (cf., for example, Chapter 3.6). Translanguaging scholars interpret the diversity of speaking not (only) as a system of languages and varieties, but concentrate on speakers and the linguistic resources appearing in their repertoires. Category-creating procedures, developing in dynamic and complex ways in speakers’ everyday life, have a central role in this approach. The translanguaging approach investigates the speakers’ view of the connection between different languages and their linguistic resources.

These procedures have special characteristics among Romani-speaking Roma, often living in great numbers on the margins of societies in the nation states of Western, Central and South-Eastern Europe. They are, just like all other European citizens, experiencers of various national and European language policies. At the same time, they speak their non-standardized Romani along with other (mostly national) languages. Their multilingualism does not fit the (parallel) monolingual national or plurilingual European policies. Their multilingualism is surrounded by language ideologies of otherness, underpinned by perceptions of Romani’s status as a “mixed” language, becoming increasingly apparent as it is undergoing continuous change from generation to generation, in some speakers’ view. It is also often claimed to be restricted to home (e.g. as a home language) and community-internal language practices (e.g. as secret languages) and to certain ways of life and activities (ie. jargons). Translanguaging allows us to describe the linguistic practices of these (bi- or multilingual) speakers detached from the idea of languages and varieties. Translanguaging proposes the idea of the multiple repertoire, “which does not in any way correspond to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages” (García and Kleyn 2016: 14). Using the example of one of our research sites, chapter 3.1 discusses in detail how the linguistic repertoire of bilingual Roma in Hungary can be presented, how they themselves and Hungarian monolinguals around them evaluate it, and which ideologies shape speakers’ (linguistic) behaviour.

Pedagogies applying a stance based on translanguaging, that is, the multiple but unitary repertoire of the students, challenge monolingual pedagogies (Creese and Blackledge 2010; García 2014) and seek to develop students’ verbal and learning skills based on their whole linguistic repertoire (García and Kleyn 2016). In this way, “translanguaging theory helps teachers separate *language-specific performances* in the named language (...) – from *general linguistic performances*, that is, the students’ ability, for example, to argue a point, express inferences, communicate complex thoughts, use text-based evidence, tell a story, identify main ideas and relationships in complex texts, tells joke, and so forth” (García and Kleyn 2016: 24, italics in the original). A teacher adopting a translanguaging stance includes all languages spoken by the students and concentrates on these general linguistic competences instead of competences linked to a single language.

A basic feature of translanguaging in pedagogy is that it concentrates on speakers instead of issues of language maintenance or revitalization. Translanguaging pedagogies do not necessarily require standardisation prior to, or parallel with, their application. In this way, translanguaging pedagogy can bring Romani into school even in its non-standardised status and to mediate the school- and home-language practices of the students (cf. Chapter 3.3). A translanguaging stance enables teachers to make use of Romani resources despite its non-standardised status and to introduce it into written activities despite its non-academic literacy traditions (cf. chapter 3.8). Our project has shown that it is possible to overcome teachers’

monolingual and standard ideologies, and thus launch a transformation process of the institutional environment.

Translanguaging pedagogy has a strong potential to support bilingual victims of racism (García et al. 2021), or, more broadly, speakers living on the margins of nation states and/or at the peripheries of global capitalism (García and Otheguy 2020: 28). The transformative power of translanguaging (Li 2018: 23) is, however, not self-evident: success in education depends on a set of factors, and education is part of a complex social system (cf., for example, Chapter 3.2). Language is only one of the factors which can prevent or facilitate success (Jaspers 2018). This volume evaluates translanguaging as a pedagogical stance and as part of inclusive and culturally transformative pedagogies re-organising participants' interpersonal relations (cf. chapter 3.7 and 3.9). At the same time, transformation achieved through translanguaging is multi-faceted and not only political in nature: changes in students' and teachers' self-confidence and well-being are all important factors in transformation. In our volume, we reflect on our experience of translanguaging pedagogies, including dilemmas and achievements.

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