

## 2.1 Data collection: Linguistic ethnographic research and participatory approaches

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The beginnings of the project presented in this volume date back to 2016. Over the years, the range of participants has changed considerably, but one trend has remained constant. The project, which began as multi-sited linguistic ethnographic research (cf. Marcus 1995), has gradually developed a participatory nature. This is not necessarily a straight development from A to B, but evolves in parallel with certain conditions and complementary processes. Linguistic ethnography investigates how local circumstances and individuals' experience are manifest in abstract structures of communication (Rampton, Maybin & Roberts 2015: 16–17), and approaches these phenomena in their complexity. It endeavours to grasp the multiplicity of reality by recognizing characteristic features of localities and of speakers and their ideologies. Commitment to, and responsibility towards, the “researched” subjects has a strong tradition since Labov's theorem of the observer's paradox. We understand participatory research as a further step towards the “other person”, inasmuch as it softens the hierarchical distinction between the researchers and the researched, by positioning all participants as parts of the same reality. The researchers no longer “investigate” the world of the researched; instead, they work together in their shared world and on the same questions. In this sense, participatory approaches go beyond participant observation: they are based on collaboration, involving all participants in research activities and in a shared commitment to a cause (Rappaport 2008). In participatory approaches, researchers' role is conceived not as dissecting the “outside” world into analytical categories and explaining it; researchers, too, form a dimension of local reality, albeit a more remote one. This approach also questions traditional value appropriations to categories such as “vulnerable” local communities and “expertised” researchers. By operating through the joint involvement of both parties, participatory research renders the notion of vulnerable communities relative (cf. Marino and Faas 2020).

Participatory approaches, have increasingly gained ground in ethnography, cultural anthropology and economics since the turn of the millennium (Reason 1998; Lamphere 2004; Balakrishnan and Claiborne 2017; Duke 2020), and they have two important characteristics. First, they assume mixed methods of data collection and interpretation, without limiting the epistemological possibilities to traditional academic methodologies, and treating local knowledge and knowledge practices as equally valid forms of knowledge construction (Lykes and Hershberg, 2007; Schubotz 2019). Second, the participatory approaches themselves can be very diverse. There is no agreement on their criteria, but issues of initiative, theme, interests and goals are of great importance (cf. Lajos 2017). In an idealistic participatory research, participants initiate and define through collaboration the themes and the goals of the research, which serves the interests of all parties involved.

For academic actors, research is a necessity, and their proactive role is evident. It is a far more complex questions whether and to what extent a civil initiative considers the possibilities of research. This is one of the most serious dilemmas in the implementation of participatory research: how is it possible to ensure that the initiative does not come from the academic side, but that academic (research) activities play an important role in the process. In this respect, participatory research approaches are not always readily separable from action research (Whyte, Greenwood and Lazes 1991; Greenwood and Levin 2007), in which socio-political objectives and even political activities are more clearly pronounced (regarding Roma-related issues in Hungary see for example Málovics, Méreiné Berki and Mihály 2021).

One way of resolving the above dilemma is to broaden our notion of research methods and epistemologies, to include, alongside methodologies and outputs validated in the academic world, other, “non-academic” activities and outcomes as equally valid approaches and outcomes of research. For example, our project included activities such as theatre and filmmaking, as well as collaborative writing and translation involving local participants (cf. Chapters 3.3 and 3.7). None of these are classic research activities or outputs but they were important parts of the research project as they supported the linguistic ethnographic and translanguaging pedagogical activities in- and outside of the school. Another way to resolve the above dilemma is to make various compromises concerning the four criteria of participatory research (initiative, theme, interests, goals). We have opted for the latter in the case of this book, which is a classic academic volume both in its structure and most of its writing style, but the academic genre-specific requirements have been reshaped as a result of our participatory approach to writing, which occurred in a collaborative way, involving all parties concerned, such as teachers, teacher trainees, and community members.

### **2.1.1 Participatory characteristics of the activities in Tiszavasvári and Szímő/Zemné**

Our project, as a whole, was initiated by academic participants. Later on, in different sub-projects, an increasingly wide range of participants became involved. Academic participants, students, and teacher trainees, local teachers, Roma learners, and, even later, Roma parents were mobilised for various project-related tasks. These actors were all involved in the tasks of data collection, data processing and data interpretation, and their activities became increasingly diversified. The authors of this volume include academic staff, teachers from Tiszavasvári and Szímő (Zemné), university students and teacher trainees, and parents from Tiszavasvári. The contribution of each of these actors to the present volume is considered to be of equal value. Therefore, texts written by these participants are not presented in a box or frame but as part of the main text. This volume is, therefore, one of the important outcomes of our research, which is increasingly seen as participatory. In this chapter we describe the steps that led to its creation. Some sub-projects based on participatory approaches are described in detail in other parts of the volume and are cross-referenced here.

The project is based on pedagogical activities which have taken place in recent years in the participating schools. Both in Tiszavasvári and in Szímő (Zemné), prior to the time of contact with academic researchers, teachers were striving to meet the needs of students coming from the families considered to be vulnerable, described in more detail in Chapter 1.3. School managements and teachers experimented even prior to the project with pedagogical approaches which involve not only students but also their families in school activities. Teachers and schools aimed to establish and maintain a collaborative relationship with parents and other local Roma.

In the Tiszavasvári School, Magiszter, the current management has been in place since 2009. It was around that time that the school started working on a complex life careers programme, which is still in operation, and which reaches beyond the immediate remit of the school. A kindergarten is included in the same complex institution alongside the primary school. This complex institutional framework is capable of providing support for those in need from birth until the very end of life. The nursery has a separate professional management, but the advantage of operating within the same institutional framework is that the school and the nursery can coordinate better their pedagogical goals and commitments. The school completed a plethora of consecutive projects funded from external sources. Each project provided a different framework to implement systemic improvements in the institution. As early as 2009, a programme was launched to target young people (aged 17 to 25) of a disadvantageous social background. This activity was successful in showing that the

school is committed to formulating a programme which goes beyond its boundaries as an institution. The programme was intended for young adults who had left the primary school, many of them dropouts from secondary school. This programme tried to reach in their local neighbourhood young people who were gifted in some way. The programmes (football, painting, parent clubs, camps) all helped young people on the margins of society to find a new purpose. They had somewhere to go and a community to belong to. Meanwhile, the programme's designers kept in touch with families and parents. For instance, they organised talent shows and competitions; on these occasions the organisers had a chance to get to know the families living in the area the school services. Later, in 2012, the organisers developed a multi-stage, gradual school starters' programme in order to support the transition from nursery to primary education, which was followed by the designing of a modular curriculum, enabling young people to spend their free time in the afternoon constructively. The school's team also developed leisure time programme plans; they organised family days and leisure activities (for further details, see also Kerekes-Lévai's comments in Heltai 2020: 131).

The school in Szímó (Zemné) devotes individual attention to pupils who have difficulty coping with school, which is made possible through the low number of learners in groups. Furthermore, in recent years the school has focused on differentiated skills development, adapting to learners' individual abilities, in the low years of primary school, and has completed a programme whose aim was to enhance teachers' sensitivity to the cultural specificities of Roma pupils. Local teachers also pay special attention to learners' experience at the start of school. In Slovakia, only one year of pre-primary education is compulsory, but a successful start in school can determine a child's future for life. Roma children in Slovakia attending Hungarian-medium schools are in an even more difficult situation than their peers in Hungary: when they start school, they have to learn not only Hungarian but also the official state language, Slovak. Moreover, they might face intolerance reinforced by negative stereotypes. The main reason for the educational failure of Roma children in Slovakia is the difference between traditional forms of community education practices among the Roma and the official education system, which makes school a place of fear and persecution in the Roma's imagination. School subjects and their specific discourses are unfamiliar to Roma children when they start going to school, although in their home environment they communicate without the slightest difficulty, in fact, they “never stop talking”. To help mediate this difference, the school jumped on the opportunity to employ a teaching assistant, an adult member of the local community, who knows the community's language well. This had several advantages. The assistant helps with teacher-student and teacher-parent communication, which resulted in the better integration of the children and a smoother transition from kindergarten to school. These steps are vital to compensate for the lack of substantial pre-school education.

With a student research group, János Imre Heltai visited Tiszavasvári in 2016 for the first time. In the months and years that followed, they spent 115 days in the town by the beginning of the Erasmus partnership in November 2019. Krisztina Majzik-Lichtenberger and Eszter Tarsoly also joined the team prior to the beginning of the Erasmus activities in 2019. In this period, students and researchers carried out linguistic ethnographic fieldwork. They conducted interviews and non-guided conversations with more than 70 participants (teachers and parents) resulting in 24 hours of recorded discussions, they attended various activities and events such as church services, family and community gatherings, extra-curricular educational activities etc. They also observed over 90 taught classes in the school.

Based on the first findings related to the bilingual practices of local Roma (cf. Heltai 2020: 89–112, 2021 and Chapter 3.1.1 of this volume), and in close collaboration with head teacher Erika Lévai-Kerekes, participants organised workshops (20 workshops by November



2019, over 20 hours of recorded material) with local teachers to discuss the research group's findings and to explore possibilities to introduce translanguaging as a pedagogical stance in the school. The joint work started with a situation analysis and an exchange of ideas in which various participant groups shared their experience. The participants produced and reviewed a "Translanguaging Catechism" (compiled by Heltai on the basis of García and Kleyn 2016; García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017, in Hungarian: <http://translangedu.hu/forrasok-2/dokumentumok-tanaroktol-tanaroknak/>). This document outlines some of the basic tenets of translanguaging as a pedagogical stance, addresses the monolingual ideologies prevalent in Hungary, and analyses the prestige relations of Hungarian and Romani, pointing out that these can be reshaped to the benefit of the latter through conscious teacher reflection. Simultaneously with this work, researchers, students, and teachers prepared jointly over 15 pilot lessons involving learners' local Romani practices, in order to gain experience for developing a translanguaging practices in teaching.

The first outcomes of our exploratory work were discussed in meetings organised with the participation of local Roma parents to allow them to familiarise with the new concept and (as we hoped) to win their support. This was necessary because, due to ruling language ideologies, Romani was suppressed both in- and outside of the school and local Roma internalised ideologies related to monolingual Hungarian schooling. The experiments with translanguaging, while reflecting actual language practices in the Majoros neighbourhood, contradicted the school-based practices of the past decades. Thus, local speakers needed to be reassured that the development of Hungarian language competences remains an important goal and that translanguaging can contribute to a greater success in this, too. Students and researchers became part local everyday life in the school and beyond, as they appeared repeatedly at events organised by the school or by other local organisations. Participants, researchers, students, teachers and local Roma children and parents, carried out in summer breaks extra-curricular projects built around activities involving translanguaging. In 2018, a theatre play was staged based on a Roma tale and with a bilingual script written jointly by university students and the local children; it was performed twice to local audiences and once in the capital (cf. Chapter 3.7.2). In 2019, with the involvement of local adults and children, participants made short films presenting content relevant to local cultural practices and with the intention that the films could be used in school-based learning and classes (cf. Chapter 3.7.2). In 2020, participants produced a storybook that could be used at home and at school, based on local Romani ways of speaking and writing (cf. Chapter 3.3.4). In 2021, participants organised a project week to work together with local adults on the present volume. The aim of these projects was threefold. We considered these activities important to ensure the success of the new translanguaging educational approach, and to make the new stance and school language policy known and accepted among local Roma. A further aim of these joint activities was to build the potential for participatory research. Finally, the projects were intended to underline that translanguaging was not offered in its weak or scaffolding version (García and Lin 2016: 20; García and Kleyn 2016: 21), whose aim is to facilitate the learning of Hungarian, but in a transformative version, which includes among its goals the reshuffling of the local prestige relations between languages and their speakers (cf. for example García et al 2021).

Alongside these activities, participating researchers and teachers launched the activities serving as the basis for the present volume, the Erasmus+ project entitled *Translanguaging for equal opportunities: Speaking Romani at school* (TRANSLANGEDUROM). Originally planned for 24 months, the project was extended to 30 months, due to the Covid pandemic. Participants undertook to produce two intellectual outputs: this volume and a [video repository](#) on which the volume is based. The latter consists of 35 video items, each approximately 5 to

10 minutes in length. The videos consist of three parts. There is a translanguaging classroom scene in focus, highlighting important moments of learning and teaching in schools characterised by translanguaging. Each translanguaging classroom moment is preceded by an introduction, typically by the teacher whose class is shown in the recording, and accompanied by reflections by teachers, researchers and teacher trainees. The videos received English subtitles.

The school in Szímő (Zemné) joined the project in November 2019, at the beginning of the Erasmus-funded strategic collaboration. Activities (interviews, roundtables, workshops) similar to those in Tiszavasvári were planned in the first project period, in collaboration with local Roma and teachers from the school. However, Covid-19 restrictions thwarted our plans. In December 2019, teachers from Szímő (Zemné) had the opportunity to visit the school in Tiszavasvári, but later we were forced to limit our joint activities to whatever was possible through online working. In monthly online workshops, 3 (of about 15) committed educators from the school learned about translanguaging and formed their translanguaging stance based on online conversations and on previous best-practice examples collected in Tiszavasvári. Only in September 2021 was it possible to carry out on-site activities in Szímő (Zemné). Members of the research group spent a week on site. They reached out to local Roma families, talked to adults from the community, and attended classes at school. In addition, local and non-local participants of the project in Tiszavasvári organised a session for all teachers in the Szímő (Zemné) school to share ideas about the most important achievements and dilemmas in Magiszter. The participants also invited parents to the school for a joint afternoon session. Around twenty parents attended a workshop in which all participants were actively involved, discussing where and how local Romani is present in the village and the ways in which the relationship between the school and Romani language practices evolved in the past. During the same week, alongside the project-implementation activities described above, we were obliged to make the recordings of translanguaging classroom moments in the school, given the limitations of time to complete the entire project. 30 films in our repository are based on classroom scenes made in Tiszavasvári and 5 in Szímő (Zemné).

### 2.1.2 Ethical considerations

As explained in Chapter 1.3, on our research sites most Roma live on the margins of local societies and are vulnerable due to multiple social dependencies. Conducting linguistic ethnographical research among them and initiating translanguaging in schools attended by their children required project participants to consider the following ethical questions during the data collection processes: 1. How to avoid strengthening social dependencies and how not to reinforce segregation; 2. How to ensure that research activities become accepted by local Roma, on other words, how to establish a sensitive approach to providing them with information about project goals and how to involve them in research activities with participatory approaches; 3. As the project is based on classroom video recordings, how to provide all personal rights defined in the GDPR Law of the European Union and being ethical at the same time; 4. Much of our work which was originally designed to take place face-to-face was transferred to an online communicative space because of the circumstances brought about by the pandemic. This raised methodological as well as ethical issues. This subchapter (and Chapter 2.2) discuss these questions.

During their joint activities, researchers, students and teachers sought to reduce the stigmatisation of Romani and argued that the parallel activation of Romani and Hungarian resources leads to stronger general language competences (García and Kleyn 2016: 24), thus reinforcing Hungarian language skills. Despite the support of the school's leadership not all teachers felt that they would benefit from participating in the project, which testifies to the



difficulties of rewriting deep-rooted ideologies and stereotypes. Many teachers, confronted every single day with learners' Romani practices, refused to embrace, or even learn about, a translanguaging stance. Tendencies to resent the presence of Romani and the lack of appreciation for its speakers are even stronger outside school than in the school environment. As a result, local Roma might feel that they would become more vulnerable if translanguaging practices were established: the denial of Romani competencies has a long tradition in this hostile environment and is strong among Romani speakers, who have the habit of hiding their Romani competences. Our translanguaging project is committed to bringing about changes in this environment, where non-Roma often strive to distance themselves from Roma in every respect. Members of the non-Roma majority usually deny all responsibility for the social tensions present in the town. They are anxious to keep all their positions in a majoritised minority situation, where the number of the inhabitants considered to be Roma will be greater than that of non-Roma, which is, assuming a continuation of current trends, in the process of unfolding.

Under these circumstances, members of the project decided not to engage in open warfare on several fronts against social injustices which are undoubtedly present. Instead, we endeavoured to achieve subtle and gradual changes in current social conditions based on professional activities. Our way to address these injustices was to create translanguaging spaces (Li 2011) with the promise of transformative power, which “combines and generates new identities, values and practices” (cf. Li 2018: 23). Project team members organising these activities currently hope to reach out to an increasing number of people in the town, to invite them to think about these issues, and, depending on their openness to new ideas, to collaborate with them to improve conditions.

Several changes are visible at the school. Teachers unanimously report that students are increasingly speaking Romani not only during lessons but also in breaks and after-school activities. Teachers who are not active in the project are beginning to adapt to this situation. Parents' attitudes have also changed; after having experienced the inclusion of their home language practices in school, they no longer strive for Hungarian monolingual approaches. There have been changes in the linguistic landscape of the school (cf. Chapter 3.6). However, all this has little or no effect on the circumstances and attitudes concerning Romani in the town (Tiszavasvári) and the village (Szímő (Zemné)). Project participants constantly disseminate the activities in the local and national press. We have a responsibility to see whether and how the processes we initiated in the school context and its immediate environment might have an impact on the conditions of social life outside school. Therefore, we constantly reflect upon our activities in this framework. Furthermore, Heltai has started an investigative project in preparation for later participatory activities, which deals with perceptions and (language) ideologies of local Roma and non-Roma concerning each other.

Legal integrity was important in the making of the films and in the protection of the students and other community members filmed. All parents signed a consent form to allow the filming. The content of the consent form and data protection notice, prepared by the coordinator University's Data Protection Officer, was verbally explained to parents and they were also given a copy of the information sheet on request. The students and parents in Tiszavasvári were familiar with and trusted the members of the research team due to previous activities, and they knew that their presence was related to Romani language practices. In order to protect local learners, project participants decided to include only those classroom moments in the video repository which portrayed them in a positive light, which showcase their minor or major successes at school, and which do not open the door to racist or other stereotype-based attacks and degrading opinions.

The reception of the movies was tested continuously throughout the project. Researchers showed some of the short films to university students in teacher training in Finland and Hungary and evaluated them together. In the UK, the first completed films were shown to university students specialising in Central European area studies, some of whom chose to write their term papers on the subject, reflecting on the transformative potential of translanguaging. In Hungary, there is a network of institutions called *Roma Szakkollégium* ‘Roma college (network)’, connecting Roma students in higher education with each other. This tertiary education network aims to support Roma students with deprived sociocultural background (Biczó 2021). In 2021, Heltai had the opportunity to show films to Roma students in higher education in one of these institutions. Some of their feedback highlighted that the pupils shown in the films are extremely vulnerable. Many of the Roma higher education students remembered their childhood difficulties and humiliations while watching the films. This occasion was also an important reminder for project participants that viewers’ perspectives can differ significantly and these differences need to be taken into account; thus, in our discussion of the films while in the making included a variety of possible vantage points from which they could be viewed. We find it imperative to point out that the films, while not shying away from showcasing the challenges, deliberately avoid focusing on the children’s potential difficulties and failures. Our intention is not to hide these but to bring into focus instead their sense of success, abilities, and potential.

### 2.1.3 Filming classroom scenes

The presence of a camera is unusual in classrooms both for the learners and the teacher. Even the youngest learners, who were in the third grade (aged 8 to 9) at the time of filming, took part in countless open days and peer-observed lessons since they started school, and were, thus, accustomed to having visitors in class. It was noticeable that there were students who enjoyed the additional attention and became more active in the presence of observers. There were, however, shier students who became more withdrawn when there were outsiders in class. Initially, the camera was one such outsider and had a similar impact on the learners. At the outset, it required special effort to balance the behaviour of the two types of learners: those who enjoyed performing for the camera had to be held back, and those who were intimidated by it had to be encouraged. Co-operative tasks and activities proved to be helpful in this: they allowed introvert students to stay in the background as group work did not require them to be in the limelight, while extrovert students could come to the fore and perform while solutions were checked with the whole class. Thus, gradually, the camera became a familiar object, as if it were a piece of classroom furniture, for both students and teachers.

The mood seemed relaxed in the classroom moments which researchers saw. Even if at times there was tangible excitement on the part of the learners, which might have been, at least in part, due to the camera’s presence, there is ample evidence to suggest that the recordings were not staged. On the recordings and on the films based on them there is a variation in the intensity of students’ engagement depending on a number of factors, which include working in groups v. individual or frontal work; at times when they were encouraged, or decided by themselves, to speak as they do at home v. in Hungarian-only classroom moments; and on occasions when they were confident in their interactions as opposed to feeling challenged by trickier tasks. This variation was obvious to researchers who could view the classroom scenes only through the camera’s lens due to Covid restrictions, and it testified to the authenticity and genuineness of the recordings.

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