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Erasmus+ Programme

3.8 Translanguaging and written non-standard language: heterographic literacy in and outside school

János Imre Heltai, Viktória Gergelyová, Bernadett Jani-Demetriou, Gizella R. Lakatos-Makula, Izabella Lőrincz-Kovács, Márk Székely, Eszter Tarsoly, Gergely Olexa

It is hard to imagine school without a standard language and its written form. In our bilingual programme in Tiszavasvári, both are linked to a majority language, Hungarian, and in Szímő (Zemné) to Hungarian and Slovak. The translanguaging project introduced local non-standardised linguistic practices into the new domains of learning and school life by dispensing with standardisation efforts. But there is no school without writing, and writing in Romani seemed for participants to be a key factor for the emancipation of Romani and their speakers. Based on this insight, participants were looking for solutions where both languages have a status recognised by learners, their families, school teachers, school management, local publics and scholarly discourses as vehicles for school literacy. In order to achieve this, we have attempted to uncouple standard language practices and writing, which are usually seen as inseparable in Europe and the Global North. We turned our attention to heterographic, grassroots writing activities in the locality and explored their role and place in school education.

3.8.1 Writing Romani: Orthography and heterography

One of the main issues in standardization attempts of Romani is to develop an alphabet. These alphabets are mostly based on, or at least related to, the alphabet of the national language in the specific country where the standardisation is attempted. During the standardization of Romani in Hungary, in the 1980s, activists developed an alphabet based on the Hungarian one, with “some modifications in the value of graphemes” (Matras 1999: 489). This is not the only alphabet but it is the one used most frequently by Roma and non-Roma activists publishing printed documents, among others, a dictionary (Rostás Farkas and Karsai 1991) and a grammar (Choli Daróczi and Feyér 1988). The authors of these publications define themselves as Vlach Lovar Roma and call the standard they developed and recommend Lovari. In Hungary, there is a possibility to take a school-leaving exam (similar to a language Baccalaureate or A-level) and a language exam in Lovari, which can gain additional scores when applying to do a university degree in certain subjects and also in job applications. These are commonly seen as “easy” exams. The main reason for this is that, due to the status and restricted usage domains of the language, the written exam is based mostly on stories and tales, and there are neither journalistic texts nor technical language which could be included. Similarly, the oral exam is restricted to discussions about topics which are linked to private domains. Since the Roma have little interest and practical advantage in passing these exams, they are largely taken by university students and sometimes by professionals working in public administration.

People who have passed these exams, however, often say that they find it difficult to communicate in Romani with Roma living in Hungary. The reason for this is that the language they learn is different from spoken Romani, on the one hand, and, on the other, the exams in question can be taken, as set out above, with relatively limited linguistic competence. In Example (1), Ella, a kindergarten teacher in Tiszavasvári with a Romani

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(Lovari) language certificate, and her colleague, Viktória reflect on the difference of the local practices and the Lovari she learned – cited in Heltai 2020a: 115, the names are pseudonyms):

- (1) Ella *A telepen élő cigányok, ők hallás alapján tanulják meg, tehát ténleg édes anyanyelv, mert ahogy az anyukájuk beszél, és ahogy az anyukájuktól hallják, úgy fogják beszélni a nyelvet.*
'The Roma living in the settlement, they learn it based on hearing it, so, it really is a sweet mother tongue for them, because it is really like the way their mum speaks, and as they hear it from their mum, that's the way they speak it.'
- Viktória *Amit aki esetleg színtiszta lovári nyelvet beszél, vagy beás nyelven beszél, nem feltétlenül ért meg.*
'Those who speak pure Lovari or Boyash do not necessarily understand what [they say]'

Boyash (or in Hungarian spelling *beás*) is a local language spoken by people considered to be Roma in (mostly) Southern Hungary, Romania and Serbia. Boyash, an archaic rural variety of Romanian, is different from Romani in terms of linguistic typology and historic affiliation (cf. Tálos 2001, Landauer 2009). Romanian, the national language of Romania, is a standardized Eastern Romance language; the similarity of the names Romani and Romanian is coincidental. In the Hungarian context, Boyash is considered to be a language independent from Romanian, and, as a result, a considerable body of scholarly literature developed around standardisation efforts (cf. Orsós and Kálmán 2009; Orsós 2012). At the same time, the kindergarten teacher brings Romani and Boyash together in her comment, without showing awareness of their distinctiveness. This lack of knowledge about the language practices of the Roma in Hungary is typical of members of the majority society.

To return to Romani, the inability to understand local Roma's linguistic practices on the part of those who learn the language in course contexts can be traced to the following reasons. The creators of the Lovari standard have included several items which are based on "international words" in the dictionary, even if these internationalisms, having a Hungarian equivalent, are not widespread in Romani in Hungary. For example, for Hungarian *cím* 'address', the dictionary gives the Romani item *adreso*, which is incomprehensible both for monolingual Hungarian and Romani-Hungarian bilingual Roma. The latter usually form the word based on the Hungarian equivalent: *címo*. Items based on "international words" are therefore preferred to those that are recognisably "words of Hungarian origin" in the variety codified in the dictionary but not by speakers. Furthermore, individual authorial modifications of meanings and attempts at word creation, inspired by purist postures, are also a characteristic feature of the standardised materials. These are tendencies characterising Romani standardization in general; Abercrombie (2018) points out similar current trends in Prizren, Kosovo.

Regarding literacy, in the alphabet recommended by proponents of Lovari standardisation, there are several letters which are different from the ones used in the Hungarian alphabet but they represent the same sound. In the following list, we provide a list of the differences in writing: first the letters proposed for standard Romani, in round brackets the letters of the Hungarian alphabet, and in square brackets the IPA sound symbols for the approximate phonetic values associated with the graphic symbols: ch (cs) [tʃ]; sh (s) [ʃ]; zh (zs), [ʒ]; dy (gy) [j]; s (sz) [s]; dzh (dzs) [dʒ]. The proposed standard writing for Lovari



includes aspirated consonants present in Romani but absent in Hungarian, and the letter <x> is recommended to denote the voiceless velar fricative [x], also absent in Hungarian. These orthographic differences are minor alterations for a linguist, but for many speakers they are confusing. Lovari language learners, who are used to standard literacy, do not understand why Roma do not (and cannot) write Romani the way their Romani language teachers have taught them. On the other hand, Roma children and adults who are less experienced in everyday standard literacy activities, “cannot surmount the barrier of an orthography different from what they learned at school” (Réger 1995: 86).

Standardisation attempts are paralleled by grassroots traditions of writing Romani, which we witnessed in the Roma community of Tiszavasvári, too. When applying these grassroots solutions, local Roma use the letters of the Hungarian alphabet, which is unsurprising, given that their literacy practices are rooted in Hungarian. Researchers and university students have encountered local literacy practices from the very beginning of their work in Tiszavasvári in social media activities. Entries and comments in Romani are much rarer than in Hungarian. Most of the Romani entries are short comments of one or two sentences, but longer texts, such as greetings and teasers, also occur regularly (based on individual experience, János Imre Heltai). In Summer 2020, student participants approached in Tiszavasvári at least 20 Roma inhabitants to talk to them about the role of literacy, and especially Romani literacy in their lives. These were not structured interviews; students were walking around and talking to people. They enquired about their experience of literacy, books, tales in the community: how much and what they write in Romani, what books and newspapers they keep at home, how they communicate with each other on the internet, what kind of fairy tales they know and tell.

Student researchers were not able to gather much information about local fairy tales and storytelling. Almost everyone told them that Roma fairy tales in the classical sense were no longer told to children, as the elders who knew them had died. They remembered that in the “old world” families used to get together and tell stories to each other, often making up stories on the spot and using them as jokes or to scare children. It turned out that some of the local Roma keep Romani printings, newspapers, Bible etc. at home. These are held in high esteem, although often they are not able to read them or only with considerable difficulty. In the discussions about literacy, local Roma also showed researchers examples of private notes in Romani. These are mostly connected to religious activities, for example Romani translations of songs sung in worship. (In Tiszavasvári, a Taipei (Taiwan)-based Evangelical church is doing mission work among the Roma – on the topics emerging in discussions and the role of Romani in community life cf. Heltai 2019). The students recorded their experience in fieldwork diaries, some of their findings are summarised below.

Several Romani written texts found in the community are related to religion. Some people have Bibles in Hungarian, but they mentioned that they have conversations with their families in Romani. Others said they owned Bibles written in both languages. The majority mentioned Hungarian Bibles, and many have never encountered a Romani Bible. Some families have a booklet published by Jehovah's Witnesses in the Lovari language. Two of the locals said that they understood many things from the text but that there were other things they did not. A third interlocutor said that he understood almost nothing from it. One woman showed a notebook in which she had summarised the content of the services and the Bible stories she had read. She interpreted them, adding her own thoughts, mostly in Hungarian,



sometimes in Romani. It was obvious that this notebook was important for her, and she was proud to show it to others.

One of the topics about which student researchers specifically enquired was how local Roma write their shopping lists in everyday life. Most of them said that they wrote it in Hungarian, because that was what the shopkeeper understood, but some said that they wrote certain things, such as *bread*, in Romani.

One woman said that in the past, Roma in prison used to use Romani as a kind of code in their letters, because it was inaccessible for Hungarian speakers. A short extract from one of the field diaries expands on this: in the past, those who went to prison, wrote in Gypsy and kept in touch with their loved ones and family members by writing in this language – as a kind of code that Hungarians could not understand. The woman we spoke to offered to invite her sister to meet us the next time we visited. Because of her age and time in prison, she said, her sister might be able to tell us more than she could at the time.

3.8.2. Romani heterography in school context

Chapter 1.2 outlined the controversies surrounding Romani standardisation and the reasons why Romani does not appear as a standardised language in schools – neither orally nor in writing. In many respects, translanguaging, as a pedagogical stance, triggers the need for standardisation. Focusing on the speakers instead of the language, project participants have examined with including the local, grassroots ways of writing into school activities, instead of adopting the writing system developed and recommended by activists of Romani standardisation. During the first translanguaging experiments at the school, teachers restricted translanguaging activities mostly to orality, but participants noticed from the outset that children wrote down their thoughts in Romani in a spontaneous way, without any particular effort. Based on these insights, it seemed realistic to build on this way of writing in teacher-guided translanguaging activities, too. In fact, it was not only realistic but almost unavoidable: as oral translanguaging activities began to appear as parts of lessons, students started writing their notes in their notebooks and on the blackboard in local Romani.

These grassroots Romani writings are characterized by heterography (cf. Blommaert 2008) and transparency. Speech sounds of Romani and Hungarian are broadly similar and the Hungarian spelling system is relatively transparent (phonemic), with most letters corresponding to phonemes. Regarding the phonemic inventory of the languages, there are only a few additional consonants in Romani compared to Hungarian: the Romani voiceless velar fricative [x] and aspirated consonants [p^h, t^h, k^h]. Using Hungarian spelling conventions results in heterography regarding the lettering of these sounds. To write [x], local Roma use <k>, <kh>, <ch> or <h>. In the case of aspirated consonants, it varies whether they mark the aspiration, e.g. <ph>, or not, e.g. <p>. Another source of heterography is linked to the use of diacritics on some vowel symbols. For example, in standard Hungarian, letter <a> represents the labial low vowel [ɒ] and <á> the illabial low vowel [a:]. The vowel [ɒ] does not exist in Romani. As a result, the marking of [a:] can happen with the letters <á> or <a>. Heterography goes beyond the questions of matching sounds and letters. Speakers – both adults in their notes taken at home and children at school – do not necessarily adhere to the word boundaries maintained by standardized writing, which can be supported by grammatical reasoning. Punctuation separating clauses and sentences also varies. These phenomena are also characteristic – and stigmatized – in less educated writers' practices in standardized languages. However, the lack of a clear orthographic norm frees writers of local Romani from this kind of stigmatization.



In school, a great deal of energy and time is devoted to practising spelling. Teachers often make little or no distinction between good spelling and other writing-related competences, such as literacy awareness and style-related competences. Among these competences, spelling is the most measurable, the most easily defined. Similarly, outside schools, for most speakers spelling mistakes are more readily identifiable – and therefore easier to stigmatise – than stylistic or other textual inconsistencies. This may be a reason why so much time is devoted to spelling and to practising for assessments of spelling in most European education systems. Spelling, therefore, has a major impact not only on success at school but also on opportunities for life outside school.

Considering the significance of spelling, it is unsurprising that Romani heterography led to a degree of confusion among teachers, and to initial disagreements among project participants. Most teachers, driven by monolingual standard ideologies and accustomed to spelling being shaped by strict rules, kept looking for “the correct solution” when students wrote Romani in the classroom. Nonstandard orthographies of Hungarian, and of standardised languages generally, are strongly stigmatised and linked to low socioeconomic status (cf. Jaffe and Walton 2000). The ideologies concerning Hungarian are projected onto Romani, too. However, teachers were faced by the fact that a sentence or a word written by one student was critiqued by another, and there was no point of alignment (a “standard”) to decide what was correct and incorrect. This often led to disruption in the flow of the class and was an unpleasant experience for teachers. In the workshops reviewing our initial experience, teachers, students, and researchers discussed and deconstructed the notions of propriety in speech and linguistic correctness. This was a reflective activity, whose aim was to raise critical language awareness concerning ideologies related to standards, which are responsible for the opposition between linguistic correctness and incorrectness. In the case of Romani, there is no standard variety, which means that the correct v. incorrect opposition is replaced by variability. Workshop discussions addressed that this applies to literacy and spelling, too, and that, in the absence of an authoritative source prescribing the rules, it is impossible to decide which way of writing is correct and incorrect.

At the same time, even when using heterographic spellings, it is possible to write words inappropriately, but this means that the written representation is unintelligible to others. This happened sometimes in the classrooms. Teachers, whose Romani competences were limited at the initial stages of the project, were often not in a position to detect and correct such occurrences. As a result, the following principles were followed by the participants of the workshops. Learners were encouraged to write in Romani. It was stressed that there are always several possible solutions, and that if everyone understands what is written on the board, there is no point in arguing about how it would be better. However, if something does not make sense, it is worth stopping and looking at it.

The implementation of local literacy practices required a change in the perception of the teacher's role. The teacher often becomes a learner in such situations instead of being a representative of absolute knowledge. The right to decide whether something is appropriate or not is ceded to the community of learners or to a learner who has gained authority through his or her own competences. This is a long, complex, and exciting process, which several teachers have gone through and reflected on (cf. Chapter 3.2 on transformations of classroom hierarchies and Chapter 3.4 on teacher's talk). Zita, for example, described her recent



experience in a television report about our program, produced by the local channel in Tiszavasvári in February 2022¹, excerpt 2.

- (2) Zita *Említettem már, hogy 18 éve itt tanítok, én egy szót nem tudtam romani nyelven négy évvel ezelőttig. Érdekes módon – nem célja a projektnek, hogy mi megtanuljuk a romani nyelvet – de akarva-akaratlanul is nagyon sok kifejezés, szó megragadt az én fejemben is, és a gyerekek ezt még jobban értékelték, hogy már néha nem is kellett fordítani, vagy értették, amit mondanak nekem, és én is be tudtam egy-két általuk használt szóval csatlakozni az órába. (...) Énbőlőlem mint tanítóból tanuló lett. Mert szívesen tanították a nyelvet, tanultam én is a nyelvet, és voltak helyzetek, amikor a diákok kompetensebbek voltak, tehát jobban tudtak valamit, mint én, a nyelvi készségeikből adódóan. Tehát ezek mind olyan motiválóerők, a hatásuk visszahat a tanulásra, a tanulási folyamatra (17:38–18:50).*
- ‘I mentioned that I have been teaching here for 18 years, and I didn't know a word of Romani until four years ago. Interestingly enough, the project does not require us to learn Romani, but, wittingly or unwittingly, I have retained many words and phrases, which the children appreciated all the more, especially because, often, they didn't even need to translate for me anymore, or they understood that what[ever] they were saying to me, I was able to join in with one or two of the words they were using in class. (...) From a teacher, I became a learner. Because they liked to teach the language, I was happy to learn it, and there were situations when the students were more competent, so they knew something better than I did, as a result of their language skills. These are all motivating forces, they have an impact on learning, on the entire process of learning’ (17:38–18:50).

Based on García and Kleyn (2016: 24), researchers also stressed in the workshops that translanguaging pedagogy “helps teachers separate language-specific performances in the named language (...) from general linguistic performances (the students' ability to argue a point, express inferences, communicate complex thoughts etc.)”. Writing texts and note-taking were presented by researchers as general linguistic competences, and orthography as a performance in a named language, in our case Hungarian. The improvement of all competences is important, but becoming familiar with Hungarian spelling and gaining writing practice can be separated from each other. In this way, writing Romani helps improving general linguistic competences concerning text production. Gaining practice in spelling skills is also an important goal at school, but a different one (cf. Heltai 2020b: 481).

Practices of heterography have their risks, as teachers with little competence in Romani may accept meaningless written forms, which are unrecognisable for readers. Such forms remain beyond the possibilities of alternative spellings arising from the heterography. This potential pitfall, however, can be turned to advantage due to the increasing role of peer-group control in the classroom. Students are granted responsibility for recognising “correct” (acceptable) spellings, thus appearing in an expert role. Furthermore, it removes teacher's omniscient role, and increases the interdependence between the teacher and pupils. These

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sf001La5MDM&t=345s>

transformations, which ultimately imply greater trust between members of the learning community, and also allow learners to experience greater autonomy, are features of the learning partnerships forged at school, which teachers needed time to get used to – just like to heterographic ways of writing themselves. This kind of Romani literacy at school, based on heterography and transparency, can be developed wherever children learn a phonemic alphabet for the language of instruction. The degree of heterography depends, at least in part, on the differences between the sound system of the school language and Romani. In case of speakers taught to read and write in Hungarian, the transparency of writing in Romani is supported by the relative transparency of Hungarian orthography, which shows an almost exclusive sound-to-letter correspondence, with very few exceptions. In the next sections of this chapter, we present our experience through examples. Chapter 3.8.3 discusses heterographic practises in Tiszavasvári based on our community storybook project (for a detailed discussion, cf. Chapter 3.3.4). Section 3.8.4, based on examples from the video repository, focuses on classroom practices involving heterography.

3.8.3 Heterographic writing as a creative process

Deumert describes the notion of mimicry in the context of written forms of expression as the deliberate manipulation or creation of unconventional ways of writing, which convey additional meaning through difference. The innovations which deviate from writing conventions of codified spelling systems are nonetheless intelligible for members of the group and, often, universally. These practices were widespread in early 20th century futurist poetics and recontextualised in the advertising industry and in digital literacies. In the process, writers play with the arrangement, size or spatial position of letters, or replace certain letters with, for example, numerals or punctuation marks (2018: 13). The Futurists' aim was to create an alienating effect in the text; for advertising companies it is to attract future buyers' attention. More importantly for our project, Deumert argues that mimicry-type creative expressions in online communication are powerful cultural statements. The aim of innovations is often to signal the writer's communicative intention and for the innovative form to communicate through its shape (cf. Deumert 2018). Mimicry in writing includes abbreviated forms (*4ever* 'forever'; *2da* 'to the'), some of which were creative responses to a practical challenge (messaging with a limited number of characters), while others intend to convey additional meanings about the writer's subjectivity or the writer's and the recipient's intersubjectivity.

Creative solutions of the mimicry type are in many ways similar to the forms arising in writing based on non-standardised Romani practices. In heterographic writing, several solutions may be possible for representing certain sounds, and their users do not distinguish between the possibilities according to the right v. wrong opposition. In the absence of orthographic literacy, all written representations and variants of a single representation are products of linguistic creativity, inasmuch as there are no available normative models to follow. The cultural statement can be interpreted in the sense that those who follow heterographic literacies try to dissociate themselves from the pressures of "linguistic correctness" mandated by monolingual norms and arising from standard language ideologies.

Creative innovation in writing results in a diversity of written forms similar to the heterographic practices of early written forms of European vernaculars. The examples which we look at below are taken from lines of the storybook produced in the summer of 2020, written according to local ways of speaking – and writing (cf. Chapter 3.3.4). The book contains, in part, Romani short stories written by the participants (*E vajdaszko történeto* 'The story of the chief'; *A bagolyiszke trin próbi* 'The owl's three trials') and in part tales from Roma folk tale collections (*Kinni tyúkjai* 'Kinni's hens'; *Miért nem tudnak a fák járni?* 'Why Project funded by the European Commission. The information in this publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.



can't the trees walk?'; *Legenda a hegedűről* 'The violin's legend'). The texts of the latter were translated simultaneously by several participants, and this process resulted in up to four translated versions of certain tales. The texts of the parallel translations differed not only in their compositional features but also in their spelling choices. We wanted to maintain a sense of this diversity, so, four parallel volumes were published to include all four versions of the translated texts. A total of five hundred and sixty copies, of which one hundred and forty volumes of each were printed (Tiszavasvári Transzlingváló Műhely ['Translanguaging Working Group of Tiszavasvári'] ed. 2020). All four volumes contain the same translated texts but with the variations in spelling and written representations mentioned above. Figure 1 shows the four different versions of the beginning of the story *Kinni tyúkjai* 'Kinni's hens' (Bari 1990: 419–421).

More kedvesa bejáta tável amenge bakhtalo adi szentno rácsi!
 Akanág pál egy puro rom penáv tumenge egy mesá. Ánde Vasvára beslász peszke csávehel, e Kincsohal. Szoduj gyéne ando gav csavargolinnász feszt. Taj egy gyesz karing lende vorbingyász egy gágyó. Odi pengyalenge:
 – Biknav more grásztesz aven kinenlesz!
 – Hát válinesztár katar to grász? – pucsjász o puro rom.
 – Me igen – penel o gágyó – biknavlesz.
 – Kacsi mangesz páleszte?
 – Deváse pángy ezera taj tiro saj avel!

Mure kincsesa bejátá tável ámenge bákhtalo ádi szunto rátyi!
 Akánág pál egy puro rom penáv egy mesá ko ánde Vásváribá beslász peszke csávehel le Kincsohal. Szodújgyejne ando gav csavárginnász egiszó gyesz. Eke alkalmothal vorbingyá lenge egy gazda. Odi pengyász:
 – Bikimászlo hin murograsz áven kinen lesz!
 – Válinesztár kátar to grász? – pucsjász o puro rom.
 – Igen me – felelingyász o parasztó – biknavlesz.
 – Kácsi mangesz vase?
 – De váse ötven ezret tá tirosájável.

Drágó bejátále tável ámenge bákhtále adó szentno rácsi!
 Akanág pál jek puro rom penáv történetó, ánda Vasvára beslász ó sávehel, Kinnivel. Szó dujgyéne gáv pirkeren mindig. Jek álkámothal szoltingyalen opre jek gádzsó. Odi pengya bikimászkóhi o grász.
 – Aven, kinen adó!
 – Hát, csingyosz kátó grász? – penel ó puro rom.
 – Még me – penáv e gágyeszke – biknavlesz.
 – Kácsi mangesz páleszte?
 – Demán 50 ezret, taj tirotável.

Drágó bejátále tável bákhtáji adi szentno rácsi.
 Akanág pál egy puro rom penáv egy történetó ko ánde Vásvárá besja peszke csávehe Kincsovehe. Szó duj gyéne ando gav csavárginász állandóan. Jek alkalmothal peleszte vorbingya egy parasztó. Odi pengya:
 – Bikimászkó hí ó grász áven kinel lesz.
 – Há mukesz te grásztesz? – pucsja o puro rom.
 – Hát igen, biknav lesz – felelingya o gágyó.
 – Kátyi desz mán páleszte?
 – De má páleszte pángy selá ezera, táj tyiro hi.

Fig. 1. The first lines of the four Romani translations of the fairy tale *Kinni tyúkjai* 'Kinni's hens' (Highlighting of alternative forms of spelling and parsing of word forms in writing is merely illustrative; not all possible variants have been circled.)

The English version of the text (based on the Hungarian original, Bari 1990: 419):

My dear children may this holy evening be a happy one for us! Now I am going to tell you a story about an old Gypsy who lived in Keléd with his son Kinni. Both of them were always wandering around the village. One day a peasant came to them. He said:

- My horse is for sale, come and buy it!
- Are you going to sell your horse?" – asked the old Gypsy.
- I will! – said the peasant.
- How much do you want for it?
- Give me five pence and you can have it.

In the passages shown here, as in the entire text, several types of differences can be distinguished. On the one hand, there are differences in the writing of consonants which are absent in Hungarian, such as the voiceless velar fricative [x] and aspirated consonants (see above); e.g. *bakhtalo* : *bákhtáji* 'lucky' (marked with red in the diagram). The short v. long opposition in vowels, which in most cases phonemic in Hungarian, is represented in the Project funded by the European Commission. The information in this publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.

orthography by diacritics: *i* [i] : *í* [i:]; *o* [o] : *ó* [o:]; *ö* [ø] : *ő* [ø:]; *u* [u] : *ú* [u:]; *ü* [y] : *ű* [y:]. In the *e* [ɛ] : *é* [e:] opposition the diacritic indicates difference not only in length but also tongue height, and in the *a* [ɒ] : *á* [a:] opposition a difference in tongue height and lip rounding. These oppositions are mostly irrelevant in Romani, where vowel length is typically an areal contact feature, present in some Vlach dialects precisely because of their contact with Hungarian, but its phonemic status is uncertain (Matras 2002: 59). The vowel system of Romani consists of *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, with the addition of central vowels in some dialects, and a backing of [a:] to [ɒ:] in some dialects spoken in close geographic proximity to our field site (Southern Slovakia) (cf. Elšík et al. 1999: 309). These distinctions between the Hungarian and Romani vowels, and, potentially, between the variable features of local pronunciation are sensed by speakers and give rise to a variation in orthographic representations, including vowel symbols with and without diacritics. There are many examples of these spelling variants in the texts above, e.g. *bakhtalo* : *báktáji* ('lucky') *akanág* : *ákánág* ('now'), *szoduj gyéne* : *szódujgyéne* 'both of them' etc.

Another typical source of heterography is the variable interpretation of word boundaries. In all cases, the definition of these boundaries was left in the decision and metalinguistic awareness of the author of the text, and the proposed solutions were not changed during the editing process. It is worth comparing the last sentences of the examples listed in Fig. 1, where we encounter this phenomenon both at the beginning and end of the first two versions (excerpt 3a–3d):

(3a)	<i>deváse</i>		<i>pángy</i>		<i>ezerá</i>
HU	'adj érte		ötven		ezret
ENG	'give.IMP.for.it		fifty		thousand.ACC
(3b)	<i>de váse</i>		<i>ötven</i>		<i>ezret</i>
HU	'adj érte		ötven		ezret
ENG	'give.IMP for.it		fifty		thousand.ACC
(3c)	<i>demán</i>		<i>50</i>		<i>ezret,</i>
HU	'adj nekem		50		ezret
ENG	give.IMP.to.me		50		thousand.ACC
(3d)	<i>de má pálleszte pángy selá ezerá</i>		<i>öt</i>		<i>ezret</i>
HU	'adj nekem érte		öt		száz ezret
ENG	'give.IMP to.me for.it		five		hundred thousand.ACC
(3a)	<i>taj tiro saj avel</i>				
HU	és tiéd				-het lesz'
ENG	and yours				it.may be'
(3b)	<i>táj tirosájável</i>				
HU	és tiéd lehet'				
ENG	and yours.may.be'				
(3c)	<i>táj tirotável</i>				
HU	és tiéd lesz'				
ENG	and yours.will.be'				

(3d)	<i>táj</i>	<i>tyiro</i>	<i>hi</i>
HU	és	tiéd	van'
ENG	and	yours	be'

For example, the pronoun and the verb is written in one word in *demán* ('give me') in 3c, and kept separate in 3d. At the end of the sentence, *tirosájável* ('you can have') is perceived by one speaker as three words (3a) and by another as one word (3b). The texts were first manually written down by the translators (local Roma participants) and then digitised by university students working with them. Prior to digitisation, places where speakers' perceptions of word boundaries did not coincide with the word boundaries defined by writers of Lovari texts following the academic tradition were marked. During the digitisation process, the local contributors' choices were specifically checked by the students, requesting correction or confirmation from the translators. These forms are therefore the result of conscious, reflective choices.

Differences specific to translingual ways of speaking also appear in the lines above. The spelling variants *tiro* (3a) and *tyiro* (3d), both 'your', may reflect the transitional status of palatalised dental stops typical of Northern Vlach and Lovari (Matras 2002: 50–51). Numbers were translated into Romani – according to the perspective of the writer of these lines – by only one speaker, and three of them used the same forms as in the Hungarian version. The one who did translate them, however, rewrote or ignored the value of the number in the original. Other differences in translation also appear, e.g. some Romani versions shows a closer resemblance to the Hungarian pattern in valence frame (e.g. *de váse* 'give for it'), others adapted the phrase to local Romani (*de mán* 'give to me'). The community storybooks, generally, follow heterographic practices, and they are examples of translanguaging literacy.

Similar heterographic ways of writing appear in the texts written during learning. Unlike the learning of Hungarian spelling, however, heterographic writing is not a learning goal but a means to an end in the learning process. Students use these creative forms of writing to help themselves and support each other. As a result, teachers need not be concerned about the variation in written forms. They can merely exploit the creative potential of the process because, according to teachers' reports, pupils are keen to take up the opportunity to write in Romani. The following part of this chapter shows examples of the learners' written output and argues that the learners' translingual writing is not only innovative in form but also richer in content than their written texts produced in Hungarian with respect to its orthographic conventions.

3.8.4 Experiences with Romani heterography

In the videos developed for the project, there are many examples where Romani becomes part of writing and/or reading activities. In Videos 27 (*Representations: Translanguaging as a concept and linguistic landscape*) and 28 (*Enhancing belonging and self-confidence through transformations of the linguistic landscape*) students explore and discuss the transforming linguistic landscape of the school (cf. Chapter 3.6). Writing is in the focus of the Videos 9 (*Creative innovation in writing*) and 24 (*Composing written texts in Romani*). In Videos 19 (*Reading Romani as a translanguaging activity*) and 22 (*Students' perception of the new community storybook*) students read from the fairy tale book (cf. Chapter 3.3.4 for a more detailed analysis). The next parts of this chapter discuss these videos, highlighting that Romani literacy – both writing and reading in Romani – became part of



students' school activities. The analysis reviews the advantages and risks of introducing Romani heterography in school.

Video 9 (*Creative innovation in writing*) shows a drawing lesson in sixth grade. At the beginning of the lesson, the students and the teacher, Erika, read and discussed a Gypsy folk tale together, and then the students began to work individually to create illustrations to accompany the text. Some students wrote text bubbles for the pictures, typical of comic books. The teacher noticed that one of the students wrote something in Romani in the text bubble and asked him why he had chosen Romani. The student replied “because it is usually written in Hungarian, not in Gypsy, and I tried it in Gypsy” ([video 9: 0.35–1.38](#)).

In this example, an arts session in the classroom paved the way for linguistic creativity, as the student not only made an illustration, but also put sentences on paper adapted to his own language practices at home. For the student, this is a new experience: he even says that writing usually occurs in Hungarian. The writing practice and the experimentation is initiated by the student. New solutions become available for the students because their Romani competences are usually better, so that a variety of solutions of a higher quality can be created. It is also worth observing the teacher's behaviour. She notices when the student uses Romani in his work, acknowledges and encourages it by showing an interest in the student's individual solution. The teacher-student conversation about the Romani writing in the bubble took place in front of the whole class, witnessed by all learners. This is a confirmation for the class that it is okay for the home language to be present in school, not only orally but also in writing. The teacher also reinforces the message that pupils have a choice about which language they use to express themselves to solve a problem. Needless to say, teachers have the power to determine the time allocated for heterographic practices, so that these do not replace the development of Hungarian spelling skills. Our point here is to underline that if teachers adapt to pupils' interests and accommodate their creative experiments with language, pupils will also have a greater interest in adapting to practices represented by the teacher – including conventionalised forms of writing.

Roma cultural references are prominent throughout the lesson. The children read a story about a poor Roma widow with many children. She abandons her starving children and eventually has to escape the devil to find her way back to them. In the end, only after her death can she care for them, in the form of a cherry tree. It is easy to identify emotionally with this protagonist, but, additionally, students in the Magiszter School often witness similar fates around them. Thus, the story and the circumstances of the protagonists are not presented here as something from the world of fairy tales, to be learned and understood as something independent of the students' lives, but as piece of their lived experience (cf. Chapter 3.7 for a detailed discussion). However, the teacher should avoid the trap of stereotyping Roma culture as a culture of poverty. This can be done both through illustrations and textual commentary. Drawings can help children to escape from the bleakness of everyday circumstances, and the poverty-related conditions they read about in the story can be reflected in the illustrations. The Romani writing in the text bubble reinvents the story in the frame of a new genre (comic strip). Romani in this role is new to children, and allows them to appreciate the whole product as a valuable part of their identity.

In video 24 (*Composing written texts in Romani*), filmed in an upper year of primary school (fifth grade, with some eighth grade participants present), from [video 24: 1.46](#), the camera focuses on a sheet of paper with Romani writing, red by a girl from the eighth grade. Prior to this, the learners gathered in group work information about local Roma customs and traditions concerning funerals and other cultural practices. After the group work, they sum up their findings, writing some of them on the board, a significant part of it in Romani, while they read or tell their solutions to the class and the teacher. On behalf of her group, the girl Project funded by the European Commission. The information in this publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.



reads the Romani sentences gathered by her group and written on the paper by herself. Immediately after reading a sentence, almost automatically, she translates it for the teacher into Hungarian. Both reading and translating is seamless. This is a complex task. Romani-based writing is here not the goal, it is only a tool (used in a familiar way) to support the learners' work with the task. It has the role to scaffold other activities of meaning-making about Roma customs and traditions. Students, at least in this group, preferred working Romani and made use of it without any difficulty in writing, too. The girl reads and translates the sentences fluently, without hesitating. On the other hand, in this successful translanguaging session, the language of instruction remains part of the lesson and the teacher is able to oversee the learning process. There are no challenges resulting from Romani heterography.

In this lesson language specific and general linguistic competences are separated, and the goal is clear: meaning-making through reflection on cultural traditions of the Roma community. Romani heterography supports this goal, and the teacher successfully avoids the trap of meddling with Hungarian or Romani spelling issues. The Hungarian parts of the words and phrases written on the board contain spelling mistakes, but they are correct in terms of content and language. Spelling is important, but it is also important that its development takes place in exercises devised and dedicated to it, and does not override all other aspects of the teaching of text production.

3.8.5 Reading of heterographic writings during classroom activities

In the lesson recorded on Video 19 (*Reading Romani as a translanguaging activity*), the children were given the fairy tale book in which the texts are in Romani. The video shows the students sitting in a circle and the teacher is giving up her seat to the student who is reading. The pupil reads the short excerpts in Romani with confidence ([video 19: 1.35–2.28](#); [video 19: 3.07–3.30](#)) while other students listen. The reading is not entirely fluent, however. After a short section was read, the class and the teacher discussed (in Hungarian) what the text was about ([video 19: 2.28–3.07](#); [video 19: 3.30–3.44](#)). The tale read by the selected students sounds familiar to the children when listening to it, as its text is translated by local Roma according to local ways of speaking. However, when they start reading the text, it seems that in certain cases learners struggle to read out the words.

This book, as already mentioned above, was written according to local speakers' vernacular and local heterographic writing traditions. In her opening thoughts on the video, the teacher admits that first she felt the children read less fluently than usually ([video 19: 3.45–4.18](#)). She explains this by the children's lack of experience in reading in Romani. However, in the end, she finds the reading as a successful learning activity overall. The teachers' tentative explanation is supported by research findings on word processing in reading. Empiricist theories (for example Nunan 1991) focus on the examination of data-driven processes of reading. Reading is characterised by a bottom-up strategy: the reader recognizes the graphemes, relates them to sounds in his/her mind and connects the graphemes to make up the word. In contrast, cognitive models of reading highlight the relevance of top-down processes (Grabe and Fredericka 1991), by claiming that pre-existing concepts of the mind (Goodman 1967) help recognize the written words. Reading is a constructive process (Rumelhart 1977) because readers, while processing the written text, activate cognitive schemata related to word shapes and recalling them from their memory. The number of schematic representations for a single word and its inflected forms depends on language typological features, too; for instance, synthetic and agglutinative Romani morphology results in a higher number of inflected forms for a single word stem than isolating English.

When a child learns to read, both top-down and bottom-up processes are present and developing. It is important to emphasize, however, that the top-down processes are also driven by previous experience; the more a child encounters a certain word, the more it is possible that he/she will recall it at first sight. In this case, it is not necessary to make out the word letter-by-letter; it is perceived based on sight-recognition. During sight-recognition, meaning is conveyed by the identification of the word as a whole visual sign (Marsh et al. 1981, Johnston 2000). As Ehri (2014) suggests, the words recognized by sight are stored in the long-term memory. The reading relying on this process increases reading fluency and results in better comprehension (Johnston 2000).

In our case, the children do not have extensive experience in reading Romani. They rarely see Romani texts at home. The processes of reading described above explain why the children needed more time to figure out the words in the tale. The sight recognition of words was impossible as they lacked reading experience in Romani, so word forms as singular units were unavailable for recollection from their long-term memories. They could rely only on bottom-up processes while reading, thus, not even those pupils could show fluency in reading who otherwise are considered to be good readers in Hungarian by the teacher.

The slow and uncertain reading made it difficult to understand the text while listening. Nevertheless, the learners listened attentively and most of them were able to understand the text, as the follow-up discussion showed. They were able to summarise the text and answer the teacher's questions. According to constructive pedagogy learning is a social process, in which knowledge is constructed in social interactions. From this perspective, the reading activity can be regarded as a successful learning event, because the children gained new experience in reading in Romani and this experience was embedded in a collaborative social learning moment (García 2014: 112). Pupils could practice reading by relying on their local knowledge and creativity. At the same time, creativity was necessary as well, in order to employ this knowledge in another language. Learners, thus, experienced cooperative learning, and being creative in reading could enhance their self-confidence as well.

It is remarkable that creativity is central to heterographic literacies, both in the process of their creation and in their use (reading). These literacies and these practices can't replace or substitute for the acquisition of standard monolingual literacy and spelling. However, our experience shows that the two writing systems can coexist in schools. While monolingual orthography is an important learning goal and key to a successful future, heterographic literacies can clearly help to achieve it. However, we do not believe that this type of literacy has an exclusively scaffolding role. We see it as having transformative potential: it transforms community members' and children's attitudes to literacy, and strengthens locals' identity and self-esteem. The learners demonstrate this in video 22 (*Students' perception of the new community storybook*). Similar sentiments were written by one of the authors of the community book who participated in the project with her daughter, when she described what it was like to pick the storybook up soon after it was printed:

On a cold winter day, my daughter entered the house overjoyed. Laughing, she gave me the storybook, which made me so happy it brought me to tears, and I thought that my daughter had never given me anything like it. She went to school, but she never even got a diploma, because she was always naughty, her mind was somewhere else. And I thank her as a mother and as a grandmother, that she [Name], my daughter participates in such things. I am proud of the women for taking this on themselves and they should participate in such things elsewhere too. As a grandmother, I will read to my grandchildren from this book.

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