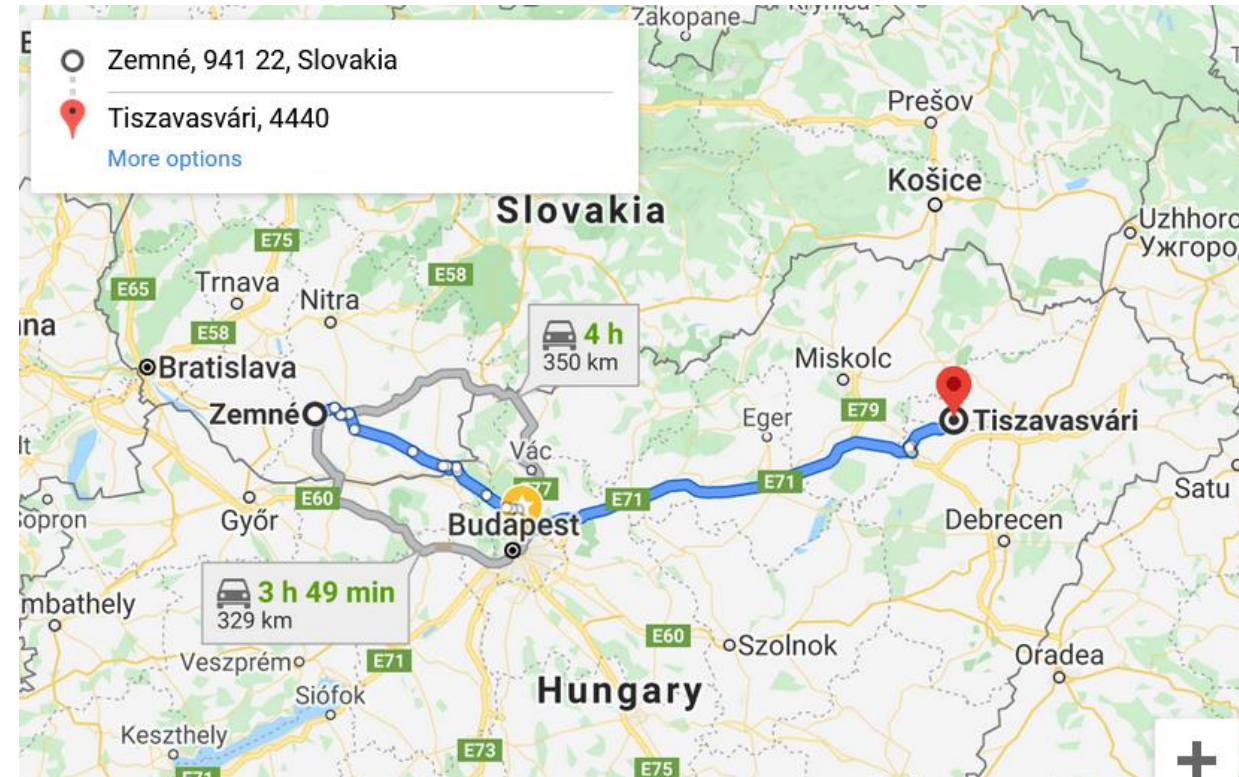


“Let the people speak the way they write!”
Variation as a resource for documentation and learning
in a Romani-Hungarian bilingual community

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Project sites in Tiszavasvári and (briefly) Zemné

- Erasmus+ project 2019-2021 in a small town in Hungary and in a village school in Slovakia
- Tiszavasvári: approximately 21.000 inhabitants, of which 3000-4000 Roma, living in three segregated settlements.
- The elementary school, with 470 Roma children, is part of the monolingual Hungarian school system but avoided by non-Roma families.
- All the teachers regard themselves as non-Roma monolingual Hungarians.



Romani and its speakers in Hungary

- Romani, Vlach Romani is a stable, mid-sized language spoken mostly in Central and South-East Europe (Ethnologue);
- Speaker population worldwide approximately 600.000 but it could be several million world-wide (difficulties of counting);
- Varieties identified in the region: Kalderash/Kelderash, Eastern Vlax Romani, Lovari (Lovarícko). Kalderash has South Slavic superstratum; Lovari influenced by Hungarian.
- All 20 or more Vlax dialects are inherently intelligible; differences are mainly lexical and sociolinguistic (Hancock).
- "Printed or pre-recorded Romani language materials may not be understandable outside the country (or context of surrounding languages) in which they were produced." (Ethnologue on Romany, a macro-language of Romania)

An ethnographic project involving a Romani-Hungarian bilingual settlement

- Linguistic ethnographic fieldwork since 2016;
- The initial aim was to understand prevalent language ideologies and practices in the locality and it involved student participation;
- Interviews, conversations involving approximately 60 participants, total duration of the recordings: 24 hours. The participants were members of the local Roma community and some school teachers.
- The research team also observed 50 school classes.
- We became grandually aware of a striking contrast between the linguistic practices employed by the Roma in and outside the school.

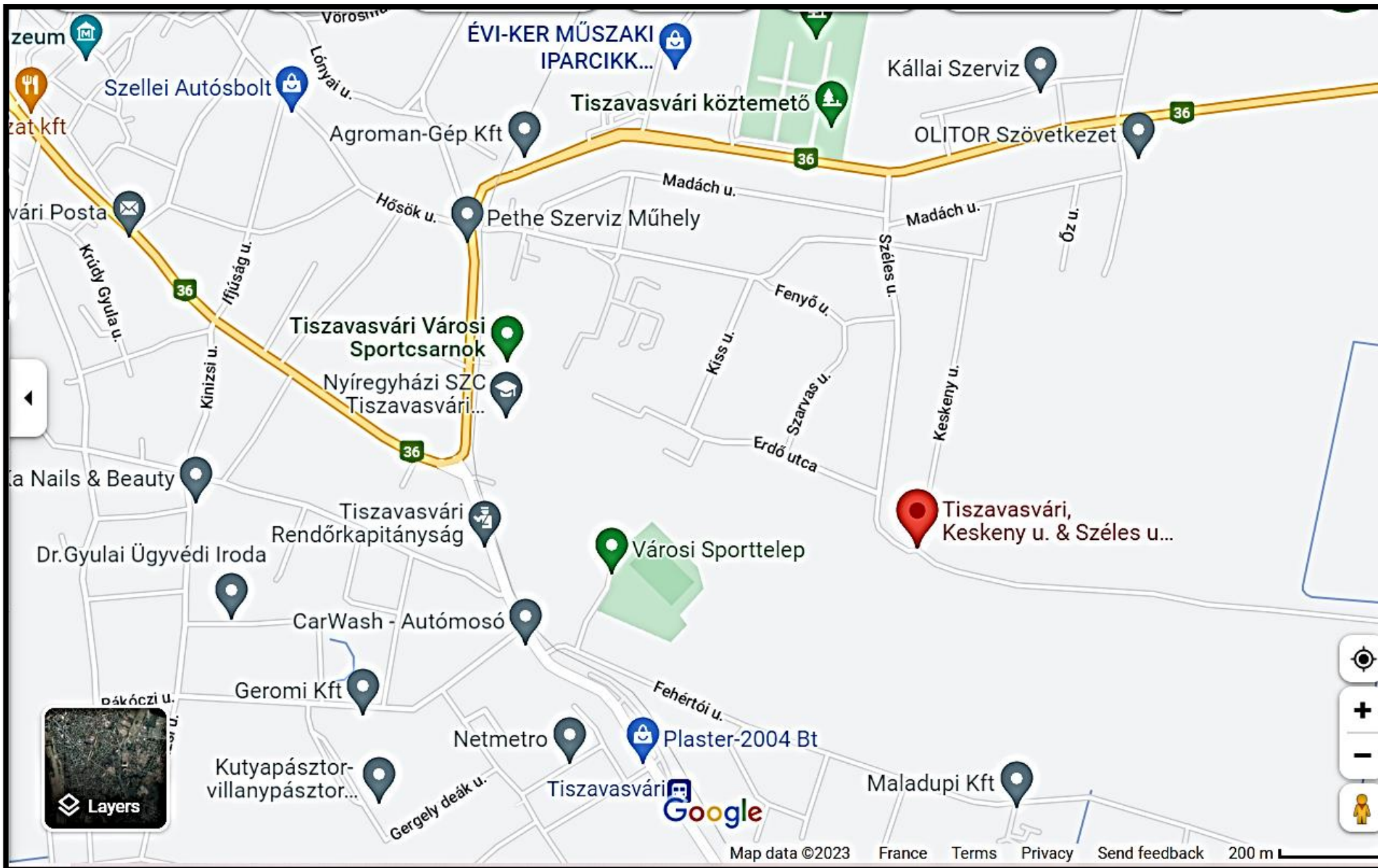
Participatory projects and ethnographic work continued with...

- Theatre project (2018)
- [Film-making project](#) (2019)
- [Story-book project](#) (2020)
- Further participation in the community's and school's life
- Co-authored volume (2021-22) to appear in 2023 June (Heltai&Tarsoly)



Ethnographic and local description of the neighbourhood

”Bilingual Roma live in a poor neighborhood [on the edge of the town](#), consisting of two main thoroughfares called *Keskeny utca* ‘narrow way’ and *Széles utca* ‘broad way’. Most houses were built as state-run social policy initiatives in the 1980s and 2000s. In the 2000s in particular, houses with relatively large floor areas of 80 to 90 m² were built very close to each other without precise land-registry measurements of the plots. These buildings were of poor quality from the outset and are now, according to our ethnographic observations, mostly falling apart, often giving shelter to more than 15 people each.” (Heltai, 2023)



zeum
zat kft

Szellei Autósbolt

ÉVI-KER MŰSZAKI
IPARCIKK...

Tiszavasvári köztemető

Kállai Szerviz

OLITOR Szövetkezet

vári Posta

Agroman-Gép Kft

Pethe Szerviz Műhely

Tiszavasvári Városi
Sportcsarnok

Nyíregyházi SZC
Tiszavasvári...

la Nails & Beauty

Dr.Gyulai Ügyvédi Iroda

Tiszavasvári
Rendőrkapitányság

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Geromi Kft

Kutyapásztor-
villanypásztor...

Netmetro

Tiszavasvári

Plaster-2004 Bt

Maladupi Kft

Városi Sporttelep

Tiszavasvári,
Keskeny u. & Széles u...



Layers





"My heart's dream is to move out of Keskeny road. There are too many Roma there. It has always been like that but I got very tired of it. I would like to have Hungarian neighbours, and be on good terms with them. Keskeny road has changed a lot, and so did the Roma. There are many more of them close together than there used to be. Before, there weren't this many people living in a single house, and not this close together. The houses built with state support were put too close to each other. Between the adobe houses there was more space, we were further from each other, we were not tied together in this way, nor were the children." (Lakatosné Makula Gizella, 2021)

Sustained and disrupted practices:

- Music: only modern, through media, although certain types of music are preferred;
- Dance: parents post proud recordings on Tik-Tok and FB when children dance using traditional steps and dance move;
- Story-telling: some adults recall it as a past habit, some say they tell stories to their children about their own childhood and everyday, but cannot remember traditional tales;
- Traditional crafts and work: clay-making, metal work non-existent, horse-dealing and dealing in general exists at least in oral tradition, gathering elderflowers for local agricultural entrepreneur;
- Social occasions, events: celebrations involving large segments of the community; practices of grief and mourning.

The way the locals see what to preserve

"My father and my grandfather travelled from village to village because they were tin-workers, you know, this was how they earned their living. Sometimes my father took me with him. I enjoyed seeing how he put patches on leaky pots, pans, bowls, kettles, cooking stoves – things you would throw out today. But these are still valuable things, and working with them was also beautiful. So, I would like my grandchildren and also others to know about such things.

In the old days, we had a better sense of togetherness, we understood each other better, even though we lived much poorer. We walked everywhere; we made everything by hand. For example, if one of us didn't have flour or something, and I did, I would divide my flour between us. My mother and I used to go to spend time with Hungarians and talk to them. We can't do that anymore. I miss that, because the old people used to tell us stories, and we listened so quietly, and I still hold this dear to me, this tradition. I am not going to let it be forgotten. I still behave sometimes as in the old days. I bake a little Gypsy bread, or, when I go shopping, I put my bundle on: everything fits into it, things I have to carry. I tie it up, put it on my back, tie it across my two shoulders, and it makes it easier for me to carry the bags home and everything. I also wear the long skirts and aprons (...)." (Lakatosné Makula Gizella, 2023)

What can be integrated from this type of knowledge into knowledge transmitted in school?

School without writing? Writing without standard orthography?

- Orthography is a more easily measurable school task than other operations concerning language;
- Nonstandard orthographies of Hungarian are stigmatised and linked to low socioeconomic status (cf. Jaffe and Walton 2000).
- The ideologies concerning Hungarian are projected onto Romani, too.
- Knowledge about the Roma's tradition and social world is not the teachers' own tradition and it is not present at any levels of learning (apart from specialised courses).

Romani standardisation remains problematic

- 1980s activists developed an alphabet based on the Hungarian, with “some modifications in the value of graphemes” (Matras 1999: 489);
- Canonical printed documents, e.g. a dictionary (Rostás Farkas and Karsai 1991) and a grammar (Choli Daróczy and Feyér 1988) are based on this alphabet;
- But speakers of local Romani often cannot read it or can read it only with difficulty;
- Paradoxical situation with non-Roma taking language exams and Romani speakers (cf. Abercrombie on similar trends in Prizren, Kosovo)

Letters for Hungarian v. letters for Lovari

ch (cs) [tʃ];

sh (s) [ʃ];

zh (zs), [ʒ];

dy (gy) [dʲ];

s (sz) [s];

dzh (dzs) [dʒ]

+ Lovari aspirated consonants [p^h, t^h, k^h] with <ph, th, kh> (absent in HU)

+ the letter <x> for the Lovari voiceless velar fricative [x]

Romani texts and grassroots traditions of writing (based on students' ethnographic enquiries)

- Social media or religious interpretative texts for personal use do not use the standard spelling system (Taiwan-based Evangelical Church active in the community but also Jehova's Witnesses with their translated materials into some kind of standard Romani)
- No other materials are written in local Romani (even in shopping lists, only a few words).
- There are Romani texts in some homes and Romani writing practices, although sporadic, when they do occur they do not comply with the orthography proposed as the standard.

Heterographic practices

[x] <k>, <kh>, <ch> or <h> (Blommaert 2008)

Aspiration may be marked or not, e.g. <ph> v. <p>.

Diacritics SH <a> represents the labial low vowel [ɒ] (absent in Romani)

SH <á> represents the illabial low vowel [a:].

=> the marking of [a:] can happen with <á> or <a>.

Non-orthographic/phonological examples:

Word-boundaries;

Punctuation;

Sentence and clause boundaries;

Paragraphs;

The story book project and heterography

- In the absence of orthographic literacy, all written representations are products of linguistic creativity, as there are no available normative models to follow.
- Two tales written by the participants (*E vajdaszko történeto* 'The story of the chief'; *A bagolyiszke trin próbi* 'The owl's three trials')
- Four tales from Roma folk tale collections translated (*Kinni tyúkjai* 'Kinni's hens'; *Miért nem tudnak a fák járni?* 'Why can't the trees walk?'; *Legenda a hegedűről* 'The violin's legend').
- The texts of the parallel translations differed not only in their compositional features but also in their spelling choices.
- To maintain a sense of this diversity 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).

More kedvesa bejába tavel amenge bakhtalo adi szentno rácsi!

Akánág pál egy puro rom penáv tumenge egy mesá. Ánde Vasvára beslász peszke csávehel, e Kincsohal. Szoduj gyéne ando gáv csavargolinnász feszt. Taj egy gyesz karing lende vorbingyász egy gágyó. Odo pengyalenge:

- Biknav more grasztesz aven kinenlesz!
- Hát válinesztár katar to grasz? – pucsjász o puro rom.
- Me igen – penel o gágyó – biknavlesz.
- Kacsi mangesz paleszte?
- Deváse pángy ezera taj tiro saj avel!

Drágó bejátále tável ámenge bákhtále adó szentno rácsi!

Akánág pál jek puró rom penáv történetó, ánda Vasvára beslász ó sávehel, Kinnivel. Szo duigvéne o gáv pirkeren mindig. Jek álkálmohal szolitingyálen opre jek gádzsó. Odi pengya bikimászkóhi o grasz.

- Áven, kinen adó!
- Hát, csingyosz kátó grasz? – penel ó puró rom.
- Még me – penáv e gágyeszke – biknavlesz.
- Kacsi mangesz páleszte?
- Demán 50 ezret, taj tirotável.

Mure kincsesa bejátá, tável ámenge bákhtalo ádi szunto rátyi! Akánág pál egy puro rom penáv egy mesá kó ánde Vásváríbá beslász peszke csávehel le Kincsohal. Szodujgyejne ándo gáv csavárginnász egiszó gyesz. Eke alkalmohal vorbingyá lenge egy gazda. Odi pengyász:

- Bikimászlo hin murograsz áven kinen lesz!
- Válinesztár kátár to grasz? – pucsjász o puro rom.
- Igen me – felelingyász o paraszto – biknavlesz.
- Kácsi mangesz váse?
- De váse ötven ezret táj tirosájável.

Drágó bejátále tável bákhtáji adi szentno rácsi.

Akánág pál egy puró rom penáv egy történetó kó ánde Vásvárá besjá peszke csávehe Kincsovehe. Szo duj gyéne ando gáv csavárginász állandóan. Jek alkalmohal peleszte vorbingya egy paraszto. Odi pengya:

- Bikimászkó hí ó grasz áven kinel lesz.
- Há mukesz te grasztesz? – pucsja o puro rom.
- Hát igen, biknav lesz – felelingya o gágyó.
- Kátyi desz mán páleszte?
- De má páleszte pángy selá ezerá, táj tyiro hi.

The community's own resources, including heterographic practices, documented and integrated into school-based learning: examples

- [Creative invention in writing](#) ([video 9: 0.35–1.38](#)).
- [Romani text composition](#) and learning about Roma traditions, in Romani, with monolingual Hungarian teachers ([video 24: 1.46](#))
- The story book as a [learning resource](#) (video 19: 02)
- Students' perceptions of the new community story book ([video 22](#))
- The [four volumes](#) of the story book

The by-products of our ethnographic and translanguaging activities:

- Auto-documentation of Roma customs at school: e.g. discussing Roma funeral customs as part of a class on early Hungarian presence and burials in the Carpathian basin; dancing on celebrations;
- Films showcasing ways of speaking, everyday life, and aspirations in the settlement, suitable to be used in schools elsewhere;
- A theatre show making space for local Romani on stage;
- A story book reflecting heterographic practices, preserving and promoting local Romani through a body of translated texts; preserving old tales;

Summary

- We used oral and written methods to record linguistic practices which are exceptional in their current contexts but reminders of the historic multilingual features of the Danube region.
- Through these activities we contribute to dismantling the European ideological posture which sees orality and heterogeneity as inferior or insignificant.
- Although this was not the primary aim of our project, our activities contributed to discovering some of the children's and the community's own stories and we built together methods and materials that might help integrating this type of local knowledge in school-based learning.
- Language documentation, ethnography, translingual ways of speaking and their documentation do not exclude but rather mutually reinforce each other.