Learning Package
on Participatory Research
in Linguistic Ethnography

Budapest, 2023

1. Linguistic ethnography

1.1

The following short quotation is from Susan Gal. Please read it with close attention to detail.

(When I entered graduate school at Berkeley in 1970, …") (…) "Scholars from anthropology, linguistics, philosophy and psychology were rejecting the long-standing formalist, structuralist paradigm of linguistics (including the Chomskyan version). Linguistic structure, they argued, should not be separated from practice in context. Those who studied society and culture in the most rigorous, empirical ways were linguistic anthropologists I was lucky: suddenly, bilingualism was theoretically interesting. The **context** and **consequences** of talk were as important as its **structure**. Those years persuaded me that ethnography would be my method and comparison my mode of analysis" (Gal 2018: 10).

Gal, Susan. Preface/Előszó. in Vanco Ildikó & Kozmács István (szerk.). *A nyelv politikája. Nyelvi antropológiai tanulmányok. Susan Gal válogatott tanulmányai magyar nyelven.* Nyitrai Konstantin Filozófus Egyetem Közép-Európai Tanulmányok Kara. Nyitra. 9–14.

Q: Discuss the highlighted words. What do you think is the difference between method and mode of analysis?

Instruction: Groups are invited to explore these issues jointly.

1.2

According to Rampton, Maybin and Roberts (2015) „[e]thnography typically looks for the meaning and rationality in practices that seem strange from afar or at first" (16).

Rampton, Ben – Janet Maybin – Celia Roberts 2015. Theory and method in linguistic ethnography. In Julia Snell – Sarah Shaw – Fiona Copland (eds.) *Linguistic Ethnography: Interdisciplinary Explorations.* Palgrave Macmillan. 14–50.

Q: Social practice is usually understood as human action which affects or involves at least one other person. For example, if certain elements of a wedding or funeral ceremony, or the way we behave while shopping, are very different from what we are used to, it could be called a practice that seems "strange at first sight". Why do you think such practices attract ethnographic interest?

Instruction: it is worth exploring the question of how we relate to our own practices and ideologies, how much we take them for granted or question them. Reflexive thinking can start from this point.

1.3.

Rampton, Maybin and Roberts (2015) also list the following as characteristics of linguistic ethnography. Discuss what exactly these mean to you

- Anti-ethnocentricity and relevance: Ethnography normally questions the oversimplifications in influential discourse, and interrogates prevailing definitions
- Ethnography focuses on a number of different levels/dimensions of socio-cultural organisation/process at the same time.
- Ethnography looks for patterns and systematicity in situated everyday practice
- Ethnographic analysis works with 'sensitising' concepts
- Ethnography recognises the ineradicable role that the researcher's personal subjectivity plays throughout the research process

Rampton, Ben – Janet Maybin – Celia Roberts 2015. Theory and method in linguistic ethnography. In Julia Snell – Sarah Shaw – Fiona Copland (eds.) *Linguistic Ethnography: Interdisciplinary Explorations.* Palgrave Macmillan. 14–50.

Q: Expand on the key points listed above in group discussions.

Instructions:
What do we mean by "ethnocentric"? What do you think we disregard/leave out of focus when our thinking is strongly ethnocentric?

Sociocultural organisation can be traced at different levels in our personal relationships. Find out what the differences are in our relationships with, for example, our family members, our teacher, our managers, the mayor of our community, the prime minister, or the leader of the opposition. Why do we need to think about our relationships with each of these people when we think about our own lives?

We should think about the relationship between uniqueness and regularity; how are they present in our own lives? What about in the way we speak? What about in a text?

Invite the students to reflect on our own positions as researchers and to formulate a position statement, bearing in mind that we ourselves are part of and shape what we study. We shape the reality and the environment we study, and we are perceived in these environments differently if we are men or women, old or young, etc. because the people with whom we initiate conversations will relate to us differently. Discuss what else, apart from our gender and age, can determine our own position, and the ways in which particular factor or factors can become more prominent, depending on where and in what context we are studying.

1.3

Read the following text carefully (it is a slightly abridged excerpt from a book on linguistic ethnography)

The Forest and the Trees

Let us (…) assume that you are entering into a field because of your own biographical trajectory, and that you are entering a conversation that has already started, although that conversation can take a number of different shapes in different contexts inside and outside academia. Your experience and that conversation may have given you some initial ideas about what is going on, how and why. We will loosely call these *hypotheses*, that is, candidate accounts of things we see and experience, which are always called into question

(supported, contradicted, modified) by new observations and by new experiences. In everyday life, these frames are usually implicit, or do not require much investigation or empirical confirmation. For example, people tend to believe things like "multilingualism is confusing and bad for your children" or "multilingualism is enriching and improves your cognitive abilities". We do not tend to bother to look closely at whether these hold up all the time, and we take them as true.

In research, you have to take the position that your formulation of the question is open, although it is based on a set of hypotheses drawn from your own experience, from the research literature and from your conversations with other stakeholders. That is, you are asking a real question, one that requires careful formulation, systematic and explicit investigation and analytical procedures, as well as explicit negotiations of position with other stakeholders. You do not yet have the answer to your question – otherwise, doing the research would be a waste of time. However, at the end of your research project, the results of your research lead, in turn, to new hypotheses and generate new research questions (…).

Put differently, your topic is not the same thing as your research question. Rather, your research question captures one aspect of your research topic – the one to which you are interested in finding an answer.

(…)

There are many different ways of arriving at your question. (Practical tip: keep notes as you go along; they will help you develop the explicit formulations and procedures that you will eventually need.). One major aspect of these paths has to do with the continuing relationship between *the forest and the trees*. Any research project must have both. You might start with the forest (or even a set of forests): some big questions that have theoretical, methodological, social, political or economic importance. You might, for example, want to know about the making of social difference and social inequality – the big question that motivates much of our own research. You might want to know how and why language changes, or how racism and racial discrimination works or what categories of gender and sexuality are important to people today and why. Put in those terms, however, it is practically impossible to construct a research project that would answer those questions. They are so large as to constitute a long-term research agenda for many people.

At the same time, they are good questions; starting from any one of them, your job then becomes looking for a way to render addressing that question feasible. You need to identify the trees, and pick the ones worth looking at, that is, the ones that help you see racism at work, or processes of construction of categories of gender and sexuality, or struggles over language that connect to access to education or employment.

Heller, Monica, Sari Pietikäinen & Joan Pujolar 2018. *Critical sociolinguistic research methods. Studying language issues that matter*. Routledge. New York. 25–26.

Q: Choose an area of your own life that you would like to write about, e.g., going to the gym or to see a show or performance, travelling on the underground, accessing and experiencing healthcare, sitting on a lecture, going shopping, etc.

Instructions: Think about what kind of practices surround the activity you chose, what kind of people you come into contact with and how, what are the dilemmas that might arise as you experience these situations, what are the practices that might stand out as "strange". Imagine your lived experience is a forest and look for trees in it. 🌳

2. Participatory research

2.1

A fundamental principle that guides each of the papers listed above is that community collaboration is not optional but obligatory for researchers committed to social justice. Such an approach demands a reimagining of what research means and what it can and should do (Bucholtz 2021: 1159).

Mary Bucholtz 2021. Community-centered collaboration in applied linguistics. *Applied linguistics* 42(6). 1153–1161.

Q.: What do we mean by social justice? How easy is it to define what someone committed to social justice seeks to accomplish?

Instructions: Discuss various possible aspects of social justice (material, moral, legal, etc.) and whether the approaches from such varied angles mean the same thing. The depth of our reflection depends on the time we have, but it can go as far as which social actors are responsible for social injustice, or whether we who are in conversation about these issues in the class are part of a powerful elite or remain outside it, maybe even critique it, and why.

A passage from a poem by Hungary's national poet, Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), cited below, may enrich your thinking. Petőfi was born in a lower middle class milieu, yet achieved an unprecedented appreciation in Hungarian literature; he was the first Hungarian poet to make a living entirely of his poetic and other literary output. His poetic style is accessible and clear in a way that was unusual before his time among poets of Hungarian national classicism. He achieved this poetic effect by writing verse which employs forms reminiscent of folkloric verbal art forms, while also innovating "away from" these forms. His texts were (and mostly are) thus accessible for a larger audience than the erudite texts of the Enlightenment. A language that can be understood by everyone, regardless of the number of years spent at

school. In the poem entitled In the *In the People's Name* he holds the ruling class to account for social injustices:

> *Az alkotmány rózsája a tiétek,*
> *Töviseit a nép közé vetétek;*
> *Ide a rózsa néhány levelét*
> *És vegyétek vissza a tövis felét.*

> *The Constitution's rose belongs to you –*
> *Its thorns among the people once you threw;*
> *Hand over now some petals from the stem –*
> *Take back one half the thorns you gave to them.*

Translated by Eugénie Bayard and Emil Delmár; English version published in 1948

2.2

Read our overview on participatory research below:

Participatory research has an established tradition in cultural anthropology (Reason 1998; Lamphere 2004) and increasing traction in sociolinguistics (Bodó et al. 2022). We present it as a practice in which multiple actors (professional researchers, student researchers, and non-professional researchers) enter into dialogue with each other with the commitment to study their shared reality. Knowledge is developed in the intersubjectivities (that is, in discussion between people) which the research space provides in addition to local intersubjectivities (that is, local discussions).

- The traditional researcher/researched dichotomy is challenged and altered, with participants becoming equally valued partners with different tasks in the project, different types of knowledge and possibilities)
- The term 'fieldwork' loses its relevance as the 'field' cannot be separated from the lives of the participants – there is an investigation of a shared reality of which we are all part
- Participants collaborate at as many stages of the work as possible, from data collection to data processing and publication, and setting the goals of the research
- Self-reflection becomes important, as in such research participants are concerned with their positions and roles in the shared reality they are examining. In other words, instead of the traditional research process, where one actor examines the other, they examin themselves in a joint reflection.

Bodó Csanád, Barabás Blanka, Fazakas Noémi, Gáspár Judit, Jani-Demetriou Bernadett, Petteri Laihonen, Lajos Veronika & Szabó Gergely 2022. Participation in sociolinguistic research. *Language and Linguistic Compass* 16(4). e12451.

Lamphere, Louise 2004. The Convergence of Applied, Practicing, and Public Anthropology in the 21st Century. *Human Organization* 63(4). 431–443.

Reason, Peter 1998. Political, Epistemological, Ecological and Spiritual Dimensions of Participation. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies* 4(2). 147–167.

Q: The features described above are not clear-cut, one-size-fits-all directives that are always implemented in the same way and/or to the same extent. They raise a number of dilemmas. Reflect on the above and point out two or three dilemmas that may arise, for example, in relation to the notion of "field". Consider, for example, whether it is possible to write a "field diary" if the participants are investigating their own practices, ideologies, feelings, and positionalities. How can this work be collaborative? Try to identify other dilemmas.

Instructions: you might want to think about the above questions along the following lines:

- How to develop a common language that is accessible to all participants and meets the criteria of scientific rigour?
- How do the criteria for ethnographic research change: what are the criteria for methodologically sound "scientific" research? - We have come to the conclusion that in participatory ethnography there are three: systematicity, multidimensionality and self-reflection.
- What genres (types of text) are scientific when it comes to publication?
- Can social justice be served effectively through scientific research and publications, or do people need something entirely different?

3. Ketháne – Cigány–magyar közösség – moments from a participatory research

3.1

Read the introduction below, which briefly explains the background and purpose of our participatory research.

In Hungary, it is widespread in Romani studies to distinguish between mostly monolingual Hungarian Roma and Romani-Hungarian bilingual Vlach Roma (alongside the third "group" of the Boyash) – Erdős 1958, Kemény 2005. The reasons for this distinction are rooted in histories of migration. The town of Tiszavasvári, whose current population is approximately 12,000, is located in an economically deprived region of Hungary and it was created during the socialist industrialisation of the 1950s, with the merger of two adjacent villages. Hungarian-monolingual Roma lived on the edge of one village, while bilingual families were settled in the other village. Today, there is still a sharp divide between the slightly smaller monolingual Roma community of around 1,000 and the larger bilingual Roma community of over 2,000 who live in separate areas within the city.

The precursor to the research project that started in 2022 is linguistic ethnographic research we initiated in the bilingual Roma community in 2016. According to our findings, the language practices of local bilingual Roma are primarily based on Romani, with young children learning Romani first in their home. According to Romani speakers' own assessment in Tiszavasvári, their Romani is not "pure" because it contains linguistic resources that are typically perceived as "being like Hungarian" (Heltai 2021: 4–5). The school attended by the children of the bilingual Roma is avoided by Hungarian and monolingual Roma families. (…) After having studied the language practices of local Roma (…), the research group developed in the bilingual children's school a language pedagogical programme based on translanguaging. This programme was undertaken in collaboration with local monolingual Hungarian teachers and Roma parents. Participants introduced local Romani into school without attempting to standardise it and made students' home language practices part of everyday school activities (Heltai and Tarsoly eds. 2023). When Hungarian-monolingual teachers became more open

to Romani, children started speaking Romani more willingly and confidently, and parents' anxieties about the presence of Romani in school were levelled with the potential benefits.

These gradual changes had little impact on relations outside school, however. If there are transformative processes, members of the research team are not aware of them. As a result of this insight, the research group focused on participatory activities with both Roma and non-Roma citizens, believing that the inclusion of non-Roma participants could help to extend the scope of our activities beyond the Roma community. In addition to collecting data online (local newspaper and television), 20 half to one-hour discussions were recorded with partners in various public roles in the city (heads of institutions, entrepreneurs, civil activists). These activities prepared the ground for the workshops organised monthly since June 2022. What makes it possible to define these workshop activities as ethnographic work is that they involve the study of local linguistic practices in a contextualised way. While non-local participants brought to the discussion a sociolinguistic point of view, local citizens expanded the scope of the discussion with a broader perspective which involved examining their lives and personal relationships more generally (Schubotz 2020).

The workshops involved six bilingual Roma and six monolingual non-Roma women. The Roma women are between ages 30 and 60 and they live in the segregated area with only Roma neighbours, have only a few years of primary education and limited participation in the labour market, working in public employment schemes or as day labourers. They are all mothers, some of them with unusually large number of children from the perspective of non-Roma local participants. Gender roles among the local Roma dictated that men should be absent from the workshops, as issues such as linguistic practices and ideologies, memory and cultural heritage, etc. are more easily associated with women's role; thus, women were more persistent in research activities. The invited Roma women were less active in literacy-related activities before the start of our programmes. However, in recent years, they translated and wrote in collaboration with other members of the research group a Romani storybook and co-authored some of the chapters of an academic volume summarising the results of the translanguaging project (Heltai and Tarsoly eds. 2023). Through personal contacts, we also invited six local non-Roma women (between ages 40 and

60) who agreed to participate in the collaborative work in the tense circumstances outlined above. Fearing that in the presence of local Hungarian men, partly due to pressure at home, Roma women would refuse to participate or be less confident in talking about their feelings and problems; so, we insisted on inviting only women. All of the Hungarian monolingual women are respected members of the local community. Two of them work in family businesses. The others are retired but still active, both in the labour market (as teachers, nursery school teachers, accountants) or in voluntary work. Similar to the Roma women, all of them are mothers. They were joined in the workshops by three researchers and a group of university students. The workshops were held in the city library, located in the town's large cultural centre called "House of Encounters". From the second day on, we video recorded the meetings.

Erdős, Kamill. 1959. *A Békés megyei cigányok. Cigánydialektusok Magyarországon* [The Gypsies of Békés county. Gypsy dialects in Hungary]. Gyula: Erkel Ferenc Múzeum.

Heltai, János Imre & Eszter Tarsoly eds. 2023. *Translanguaging for equal opportunities: Speaking Romani at school.* Berlin: De Gruyter.

Heltai, János Imre. 2021. Translanguaging as a rhizomatic multiplicity. *International Journal of Multilingualism.* https://doi.org/10.1080/14790 718.2021.1926465

Kemény, István. 2005. History of Roma in Hungary. In István Kemény (ed.), *Roma of Hungary* (East European Monographs 702), 1–69. Boulder: Columbia University Press.

Schubotz, Dirk. 2020. Group discussion methods in participatory research. In Dirk Schubotz, Why and How to Involve People in Research?, 148–182. Sage Publications.

Q: Do you know anyone who lives with two or more languages in their daily life? What have you noticed about the experience of being bilingual? Have you ever experienced the ways in which gender roles are affected by, and affect, our social positions?
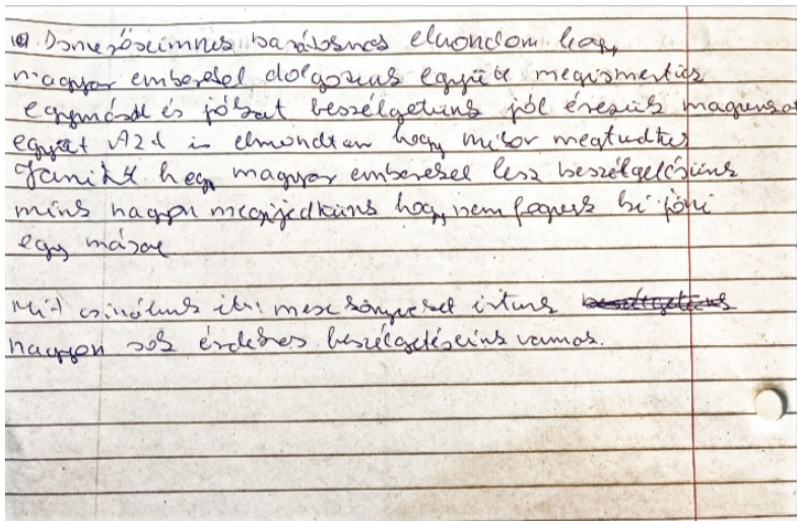
3.2

After the third workshop, we were interested to see how participants talked about the workshops to other people: their friends and acquaintances. We asked them to tell us what they usually say when asked about what we do here. Listen to some of their answers and then reply to the questions below.

A)

I tell my friends and acquaintances that we work with Hungarians, we get to know each other, we have good conversations and we have fun together. I also tell them that when we heard from Jani (János Imre Heltai) that we would be talking to Hungarians, we were very afraid that we would not get along.

What do we do here? We have written a story book together and we have many interesting conversations together.

B)

A project by a linguist and students at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, where Gypsy and Hungarian women talk to each other about their lives and customs for research purposes. We get to know each other, thus strengthening tolerance and respect, and friendships are formed. For me, this is inspiring, and I try to pass it on as an experience to my immediate and wider environment.

C)
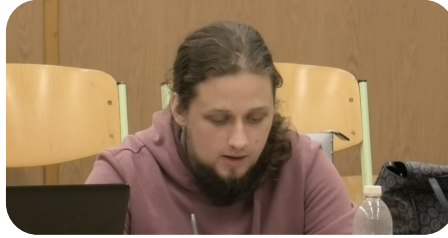
We do participatory research, which means that the people in the meeting raise questions together and plan what the research should be about. Part of the research is also to discuss local issues such as education, language issues, the use of Romani and Hungarian, and to facilitate people talking to each other.

Q.: The three responses (two from local participants, one from a non-local participant) show how differently the joint participatory activities are seen by various actors. Do you think this is a problem? What do you think are the consequences of this for research? There is also evidence that the participants' language registers are diverse. How might this affect language issues in a research project, how does it relate to the constraint that we all traditionally associate with the high-prestige "scientific" register of academic knowledge transfer?

Instructions: In the discussion, focus on the fact that the degree of participation can vary. The participatory nature of an activity can mean only that the data collection is done in collaboration with local people. However, it is also important that local people (because of their different lived experience) shape the direction of the research, bringing in different perspectives from those of the professional researchers. It also follows from the above that local people are more likely to "apply" research findings in their everyday lives: it is not the formal research findings that are important to them but the way in which their lives are changed as a result. Explore these points in your discussion.

3.3

The fourth workshop took place not in the library but in a classroom in a primary school where Roma and non-Roma pupils study together after the closure in recent years of a segregated school in the town, which catered only for Roma pupils. In the school where Roma and non-Roma learners study togetherdaily coexistence is not without difficulties: there is a lot of controversy and tension. On their way to the workshop, our participants met pupils who had just left the school and the issue of segregation was raised in the workshop. We quote some sentences from an important discussion on this topic by one Roma participant. As this was not an easy discussion for those involved, we have decided to analyse here what was said only in written form.

"The children don't have a chance to get used to Hungarian if they are surrounded by Gypsies all day. But Hungarian children either, they cannot get used to Gypsies. […] You know what we used to do, don't you? Everybody knows. I mean, Gypsies. [Others murmuring: we also went to school there, yes, we know.] The first thing I did when Kori, my daughter, came home from school was to check her hair thoroughly for lice. I bathed her, I always checked her nails so that they are not dirty. I also warned her constantly "Kori, wash your hands at the end of each pause". Always, on every blessed day, I gave her clean clothes, top to toe, and I would have never thought that Hungarian children were better than mine, either in their hygiene or in their manners. She also always had separate shoes, a pair for PE, a pair for home, a pair for school. And believe me, whichever Gypsy child goes to school with Hungarians, their mothers do just the same, and we buy them the best clothes. Coates, too, for home, and for school."

"But why…? Why should there be schools for Gypsies and separate schools for Hungarians? The children don't have a chance to get used to Hungarian if they are surrounded by Gypsies all day. But Hungarian children either, they cannot get used to Gypsies. […] You know what we used to do, don't you? Everybody knows. I mean, Gypsies. [Others murmuring: we also went to school there, yes, we know.] The first thing I did when Kori, my daughter, came home from school was to check her hair

thoroughly for lice. I bathed her, I always checked her nails so that they are not dirty. I also warned her constantly "Kori, wash your hands at the end of each pause". Always, on every blessed day, I gave her clean clothes, top to toe, and I would have never thought that Hungarian children were better than mine, either in their hygiene or in their manners. [A non-Roma participant's voice in the background: "well, you know, if everybody behaved like you…"] She also always had separate shoes, a pair for PE, a pair for home, a pair for school. And believe me, whichever Gypsy child goes to school with Hungarians, their mothers do just the same, and we buy them the best clothes. Coates, too, for home, and for school. So that they don't say "stinky Gypsies", "there, the filthy Gypsies have arrived, they brought their lice to the school". We were always taunted like this, and this is not over yet. […] And the Hungarians, with due respect to the exceptions, among Hungarians and among Gypsies alike, only those will be on good terms with each other, who are able to love. Those who are unable to love will always be prejudiced towards Gypsies."

Q.: The two quotations talk about the effects of prejudice from the perspective of the "subaltern", the marginalised and minoritized Roma; what do we learn from this perspective, what does it tell us?

Instructions: in the extract above we read the translated transcription of the words of a speaker whose position, in terms of power relations, is grounded in a subordinated group. An important feature of the extract is that, in the heat of the moment and in the safe space provided by the workshop, the participant speaks without trying to conform to the expectations of the superior, or majoritised, group or listeners. In raciolingiustic discourses, the tendency to conform to the expectations of the group whose members are perceived as more powerful in a specific social situation is captured by the term "white listening subject" – It is worth thinking through this concept in the discussion.

The very fact that the speaker speaks in this way creates tension; it was a part of a conversation where conflict was brought to the

fore. In the workshop held the following month, an attempt was made to release this tension through reflection, and by rendering it productive for research (cf. point 3.4).

3.4

As a follow-up to the October debate on segregation, a month later, in November, we set ourselves the goal of looking at how Roma and non-Roma live together in the city, where they can meet, where they can speak, and which languages. We worked in groups, and below you find excerpts from the presentation given by two groups. The presentation summarised the outcome of their discussion. The group work took approximately 20 minutes to complete. One group was given the task of collecting information about the places where Roma and non-Roma meet in town. The other group was asked to find out whether there is bilingualism in certain areas of the city or whether there is more monolingualism in Hungarian. Watch the videos on the presentations.
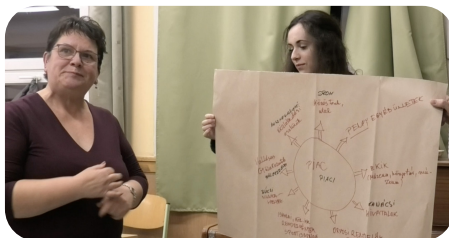
Q: To what extent do you think this was a release of the tension that appeared in the text you read before? What does the speakers' body language reveal? If we look only at body language, what is the difference between the

speakers? What do you think about the Roma participants speaking partly in Romani, even though not everyone in the room understands what they are saying? What do you think is the nature of the knowledge that each of the actors imparts to the others through their talks? Are there differences between the speakers in this respect? How do you think this kind of knowledge can be marketed as "academic"? Is it important for it to become rated as such? Why (not)?

Instructions: Explore what it feels like, from a researcher's point of view, to find oneself in a situation where one understands little or nothing of what is being said. What can we as researchers gain from not understanding what is being said?

There are noticeable differences in the way each speaker addresses the topic. It is worth considering whether it makes any difference that in the first video one speaker lists many places where Roma and non-Roma come into contact, while the other speaker talks about one or two places in more detail and in a very different style. Similar patterns can be observed in the second video. Reflect on this pattern in your groups.