

THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES ON THE LANGUAGE PRACTICES OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA*

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This study aims to attempt to elucidate how a complex network of language ideologies affects the attitudes of the language community of the Roma in Slovakia towards Romani and how certain language ideologies lead to particular language practices depending on how they represent the interests of an individual (or a group). As language ideologies related to the Roma's attitudes to Romani and their communication practices represent a complex system of interrelated ideologies, two language ideologies shall be defined as fundamental for the purposes of this study: the ideology of a minority language and the ideology of the language of a national minority. These two ideologies shall be understood as opposing each other. The ideology of a minority language carries negative connotations. It is characterized mainly by the view of Romani as an inferior language, which is shared by the majority population and consequently also by some members of the minority group. This ideology is related to accepting the absolute dominance of the official state language, the ideology of the harmfulness of bilingualism, and the ideology of language assimilation. The ideology of the language of a national minority, on the other hand, has some positive connotations. It includes the ideology of a fully-fledged language, the ideology of the equality of all languages, the ideology of standard language, or the ideology of children's right to education in their mother tongue. Both fundamental language ideologies are framed by the ideology of official language and the ideology of bilingualism, which acquire different manifestations in these systems.

Key words: Romani in Slovakia, minority language ideology, national minority language ideology, state language ideology, ideology of bilingualism, standard language ideology, ideology of a child's right to be educated through his mother tongue

Introduction

This study aims to demonstrate how the complicated network of language ideologies has influenced the attitudes of the language community of Roma in Slovakia towards the Romani language and how certain language ideologies

have led to the adoption of particular language practices.¹ It is a well-known fact that language ideologies reflect the social and political atmosphere in a country. They change and develop in response to changes in the country. A change can affect the language attitudes and language behaviour of an entire language community or only of individuals, who adapt to new circumstances, and language ideologies can serve as a strategic means² to achieve or strengthen their interests. For example, some Slovak Roma have submitted to the majority (state) language ideology only to the extent that they are able to communicate in the majority environment; others have sought linguistic assimilation to achieve parity in the majority society. In response to a different political situation after Slovak Roma were officially given the status of a national minority in 1991, some representatives of their cultural elite sought a language revalorization.³ Language ideologies are also closely linked with the formation of a social and political reality. An example may be the use of certain language ideologies (for example, the ideology of the superiority of the state language as the only official language used at all levels, or the ideology of an inferior minority language) which contribute to the exclusion of an entire language community or of an individual from the majority language community or from a specific social or

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¹ The assumption that certain language ideologies *cause* and, in a weaker sense, *guide*, *influence*, or *underline* certain language practices is tested, for example, by NEKVAPIL, S., SHERMAN, T. Language Ideologies and Linguistic Practices: The Case of Multilingual Companies in Central Europe. In *Ideological Conceptualizations of Language: Discourses of Linguistic Diversity*, p. 86.

² BRES, J. de. *Language Ideologies for Constructing Inclusion and Exclusion: Identity and Interest in the Metalinguistic Discourse of Cross-Border Workers in Luxembourg*, p. 60.

³ For more about Roma's efforts to popularize the use of Romani, see, for example, RÁCOVÁ, A. *The First Use of the Romani Language in Government Documents in Slovakia*, pp. 331–343; RÁCOVÁ, A. *Rómčina v slovenskom jazykovom a spoločensko-historickom kontexte: jej podoby a funkcie* [Romani Language in Slovak Language and Socio-Historical Context: Its Forms and Functions], pp. 317–331 or RÁCOVÁ, A. *Uplatňovanie rómčiny ako jazyka národnostnej menšiny na Slovensku* [Introducing Romani as a National Minority Language in Slovakia], pp. 302–319.

cultural group, or vice versa, to their inclusion in such a group.⁴ Finally, I will try to demonstrate that language ideologies constitute a complicated system, that several of them usually function in a given language community or with individuals simultaneously, even together with opposing language ideologies, and they often determine each other. As Trumper and Maddalon claim, “the relevance and influence of such ideologies may fluctuate from the variable modification of speakers’ linguistic habits to political decisions with sometimes dramatic effects”.⁵

Background

The present study is based on an analysis of published metalinguistic discourses, semi-structured interviews, and of the practical use of the language. Its results, however, cannot be generalized since the national minority of Slovak Roma is socially, economically, educationally, and linguistically diverse, which is, quite naturally, also reflected in their attitudes towards Romani. As a result, no conclusions can be applied to all Roma in the Slovak Republic. As is shown, for example, by a study authored by M. Hajská,⁶ Vlachika Roma, who live in a location which the author calls Borovany, have quite a different attitude towards their language than the Roma respondents in our field research, or the Roma authors of the quoted publications. It is linked with the fact that Vlachika Roma are a specific Roma group as well as with the fact that the Vlachika Roma who were studied by M. Hajská live in a settlement secluded from the majority population. Other, non-Vlachika, Roma in segregated settlements probably do not represent a typical sample of Slovak Roma either, whether lifestylewise or languagewise, because unlike the majority of the other (non-segregated) Roma, they preserve their mother tongue to a much greater degree. This may be the reason why some of our respondents believe that if settlements cease to exist, Romani might cease to exist too:

⁴ NEKVAPIL, S., SHERMAN, T. *Language Ideologies and Linguistic Practices: The Case of Multilingual Companies in Central Europe*, p. 86.

⁵ TRUMPER, B. J., MADDALON, M. *Local – Global – Glocal: Trends in the Criterion of Linguistic Prestige and Ideology*, pp. 11–34.

⁶ HAJSKÁ, M. *Gadžikanes vaj romanes? Jazykové postoje olašských Romů jedné východoslovenské komunity ke třem místně užívaným jazykům* [Gadžikanes vaj romanes? The Language Attitudes of the Vlachika Roma from one East Slovak Community towards Three Locally Used Languages], pp. 346–373.

“As long as there are settlements, it will be a living language. If there are none, it will gradually vanish.” (A. K.)

“Our strength is in segregated places, in settlements, it is where the language is really powerful, it is the first language for everything, it is where you can see that the language is not dying. Integration can cause the loss of much of the language...” (J. V.)

“Language doesn’t draw power from those on top but from those down below. You’ll find the power in settlements, with old and poor people.” (J. V.)

The situation in settlements is to a certain extent preserved. However, most Roma live outside segregated settlements⁷ in a much more intense contact with the majority population or members of other national minorities. Most respondents to our survey were representative of this group of Roma. In addition, since this study also comprises an analysis of published texts written by Roma authors, we also focused on the Roma who are more aware of their language situation and of the possibilities offered by the language as a means of political struggle and who also contribute to creating the current form of Romani and its use.⁸ Our research material was supplemented by statements by Roma from different corners of Slovakia who do not live in segregated settlements.⁹

⁷ According to *Atlas rómskych komunit na Slovensku* [Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia], there were 402,840 Roma living in Slovakia in 2013, which means that Roma account for 7.45% of Slovakia’s population. 53.7% of the Roma lived in 804 settlements of various type: 12.9% lived in intra-municipal settlements, 23.8% lived in settlements on the outskirts of municipalities, and 17% lived in segregated settlements removed from municipalities. 46.5% of Slovak Roma lived scattered among the majority population.

More Roma live in the east of Slovakia than in other regions.

⁸ We quote the statements by these Roma under their full name.

⁹ The statements by these Roma were collected as part of our field research in 2015 by Milan Samko, a Rom whose familiarity with the Roma environment and Romani enabled establishing a direct contact with the respondents. The research was conducted by means of semi-structured individual interviews, which focused on the topics and questions which we had prepared together. The field research involved 11 respondents, who had been selected based on basic socio-linguistic criteria: age (18–58 years), gender (2 male and 9 female respondents), education (4 had elementary school education, 5 had secondary school education, and 2 had university education), and a different place of residence. All the interviews (except for one) were conducted in the

Approach to Examining Language Ideologies

There are at least two approaches to examining what language ideologies play a role in a language community (with an individual) – we can choose the known language ideologies which we consider relevant for achieving our goal (like Bres¹⁰), or we can define a set of language ideologies applied in a given environment based on collected material (like Nekvapil – Shermann¹¹). For our study we consider appropriate to choose relevant known ideologies with emphasis on the language ideologies which, in our view, best characterize the Romani language community. Since the language ideologies related to Roma's attitudes towards Romani and to their communication practices represent a complicated system of mutually linked ideologies, for the purposes of this study we define as fundamental two language ideologies: a minority language ideology and a national minority language ideology. These comprise further language ideologies. The two basic language ideologies are framed by the state language ideology. It is one of the directly declared ideologies which are an open manifestation of political power. It is entrenched in *Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic of 15 November 1995 on the State Language of the Slovak Republic* (No. 270/1995, amended by Act No. 125/2016) and in *Act on the Use of the Languages of National Minorities* (184/1999, amended by 204/2011), which define the position of the Slovak language and the position of minority languages in the Slovak Republic. Both of these laws reflect a majority language ideology, the superiority of the majority's language over the other languages in the Slovak Republic. This language ideology affects the attitudes towards the language and its use of all Roma, including those who live in settlements and speak predominantly Romani. Although they preserve their mother tongue and do not find it necessary to assimilate linguistically, it is evident in the necessity to speak the state language in contact with state authorities. This ideology defines the competences of Romani. Roma are not ordered to speak Slovak, but they are automatically expected to do so in contact with the majority.¹²

Romani language, recorded, transcribed, and analysed. To preserve the anonymity of the respondents, we use their initials when quoting them.

¹⁰ BRES, J. de. *Language Ideologies for Constructing Inclusion and Exclusion: Identity and Interest in the Metalinguistic Discourse of Cross-Border Workers in Luxembourg*.

¹¹ NEKVAPIL, S., SHERMAN, T. *Language Ideologies and Linguistic Practices: The Case of Multilingual Companies in Central Europe*.

¹² In such a case McGroarty speaks of declared and silently accepted language ideologies. In MCGROARTY, M. *The Political Matrix of Linguistic Ideologies*, pp. 98–112.

We consider the minority language ideology and the national minority language ideology to be opposing. The minority language ideology is characterized mainly by the opinion that Romani is an inferior language, which is held by the majority population and subsequently also by some members of the minority. This is also linked with the acceptance of the absolute dominance of the state language, the ideology of the harmfulness of bilingualism, and the ideology of language assimilation. The attitude of Roma towards Romani naturally has an effect not only on the extent of its use, but also on its character. If Roma submit to the ideology of the minority (inferior) language, which can be used only in a narrow community and to communicate about a relatively narrow scope of topics, the language does not develop sufficiently. It has an insufficiently rich vocabulary (it lacks especially terminology), which enables the strengthening of the dominance of the majority language – vocabulary expands by borrowing many naming units from Slovak.¹³ On the other hand, the diversity of Romani dialects is preserved.

The national minority language ideology, on the contrary, includes, for example, the ideology of a fully functioning language, the ideology of the equality of all languages, the ideology of the standard language, and the ideology of children's right to be educated in their mother tongue. An important role here is played by the state language ideology, but it is modified in the spirit of the ideology of national minority languages. Recognizing the language rights of minorities to some extent questions the idea of one country and one language because it acknowledges the multilingual character of the country. In applying this ideology, most attention is paid to the state language, none of the minority languages has achieved such a status to be regarded as equal to the state language or to question its dominance. Despite that, also the languages of the national minorities have acquired new rights and possibilities granted by law. Roma's attitudes are still significantly influenced by the ideology of bilingualism, which acquires a new character. Bilingualism is not considered to be only harmful. Quite the opposite, some originally monolingual Roma, who spoke only Slovak, are learning Romani to be able to work with Roma more effectively. They include, for example, Roma students from the Institute of Roma Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. It is expected that a knowledge of Romani will help them to establish a more direct contact with the Roma they should be working with in the future. But there are also other Roma, as suggested by this statement:

¹³ Slovak borrows words from Romani very rarely (*čavargovať*, *čavo*, *čajočka*, *love*, *more*), and they are stylistically marked. They do not become part of the standard language, but they are used only in a specific context (jargon, slang).

I have been using Romani at work for several years, but only occasionally... It wasn't always like this. I didn't learn it in the family, but I learned it as a foreign language.¹⁴

If Roma subscribe to the ideology of the national minority language, which is equal to the languages of the other national minorities in Slovakia, it can contribute to its development as well as to its use outside the narrow community.

Minority Language Ideology

In the past the position of Romani was influenced by the minority language ideology, which viewed Romani as an inferior, negligible language. Although Romani is spoken by thousands of people, it was considered a language which cannot be used in all spheres of life and which can only serve for communication in the Roma environment. Here it serves as an element of inclusion (within the minority) and as an element of exclusion (it distinguishes the minority from the majority). As is known, such exclusion can, on the one hand, weaken the ethnic self-awareness of the minority, but on the other hand, it can also strengthen it because the minority speak a language which the majority do not understand.

Roma have been forced to view their own language as inferior throughout the whole history. The ideology of the inferiority of the language was linked with the ideology of the inferiority of the Roma ethnic group. Roma were mostly regarded as people living on the margins of the majority society; therefore, they had to be deprived of the characteristic way of life, which, in some cases, meant there were efforts to uproot their language. An example were Maria Theresa's edicts, issued in 1758 – 1773, which, besides other things, prohibited Gypsies from speaking their mother tongue and forced them to use the language of the nation within which they lived.¹⁵ The Roma people were also held in contempt in the following periods, which was inevitably reflected in how they perceived their own identity. Many of those who wanted to better their social position “concealed” their Roma identity, which included the Romani language. The negative attitude towards their own language, which Roma appropriated from the majority society, was further reinforced by the opinion that the Romani language was useless because one could communicate in it only

¹⁴ LUPTÁKOVÁ, J. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

¹⁵ AUGUSTINY AB HORTIS, S. *Cigáni v Uhorsku* [Gypsies in Hungary], pp. 158–159.

in a relatively small circle of people – in a family or in contact with other Roma people. It was not a language in which you could write, read, educate, or apply for a decent job.

This ideology of the inferiority of the Romani language, which was implanted by the majority, inevitably penetrated deep into the consciousness of the Roma community. In some situations they conformed to the ideology, sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously. However, it always surfaced when it became an obstacle in the effort of the language community or an individual to fulfil their interests. Unlike in some other countries, Roma in Slovakia have not given up Romani. On the contrary, the language is still alive today. However, at an individual level Roma people's attitudes toward Romani and communication practices vary. It manifests itself, for example, in the application of the ideology of societal bilingualism. Roma people and the majority society have taken it for granted that the adult Roma population always spoke, besides Romani, at least one more language, in which they communicated with other language communities they shared the territory of Slovakia with. At present they speak mainly Slovak, which is the language of the majority population and the official language used in state institutions. In areas inhabited by the Hungarian minority they also speak Hungarian.

There is a whole range of the manifestations of Roma bilingualism, which reflects different interests and goals of the Roma community. On one end of this range are Roma communities living in segregated settlements, and on the other end are assimilated Roma families living scattered among the majority population.

In segregated Roma settlements Roma people use Romani to communicate with their family members and the other members of the Roma community. Although adult Roma people usually speak Slovak, which they have inevitably learnt due to frequent contact with the majority population and at school, they use Romani only to communicate with their children. As a result, children cannot speak Slovak until they start attending school, but eventually, they acquire Slovak the way their parents did.

On the contrary, some individuals, usually the Roma elite, who wanted to reach equality with the majority society, voluntarily gave up their mother tongue a long time ago. They considered Romani and other aspects of Roma life and culture to be obstacles in the pursuit of their goal. They renounced their mother tongue to avoid being associated with the despised Roma ethnic group. They thought it was useless because the knowledge of the language did not mean access to education and employment, and its use in an inter-community environment, although in addition to Slovak, in many cases led to the insufficient acquisition of the majority language and to problems when children started school attendance. By doing so, they non-verbally acknowledged the

inferiority of their own language (and the Roma way of life) and the superiority of the majority (usually state) language (and the non-Roma way of life). They considered bilingualism harmful. They gave up speaking Romani and did not teach Romani to the subsequent generations. They became monolingual members of the assimilated group of Roma people in the majority society.

After the Second World War, either under the pressure of the majority or by their own decision because they wanted to become part of the majority society, Roma stopped speaking their mother tongue to their children. A perfect knowledge of Slovak was supposed to be the first step toward a better life in a new society without any differences. We all know how it has turned out. Roma are not equal members of society and most of them have forgotten their language.¹⁶

Between these two groups of Roma, there are Roma who are characterized by various (sometimes unconscious) attitudes towards Romani. They have usually been in frequent contact with the non-Roma population since they were children. They often speak both Romani and Slovak at home, although when talking to parents, they may prefer Romani. When playing in the street, children talk to non-Roma children in Slovak, thus acquiring both languages, as suggested by our respondents:

"We spoke both Romani and Slovak at home. Slovak was always present at home, but Romani was the preferred language. We spoke both Romani and Slovak to our parents." (A. K.)

"The predominant language in the town where we lived with the gajos was Slovak. It was pushing out Romani." (A. K.)

"We learnt Slovak alongside Romani. We were not living in a place inhabited only by Roma, where we could hear only Romani. We lived among non-Roma. We could also hear Slovak, we were visited by non-Roma on a daily basis, we went to kindergarten together with non-Roma kids, we had non-Roma friends. We went out, and it was natural for us to speak both languages. I don't remember having problems with either Slovak or Romani. Everything went easily if you spoke two languages." (J. V.)

¹⁶ OLÁH, M. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

Even in such a bilingual community of Roma, Romani may be gradually lost, for example as a result of higher education, which is provided in the state language.

“I have received information in Slovak all my life... Those who are educated have little space for using Romani. It has been pushed out by Slovak, even at home. Roma cannot have a serious discussion in Romani the way they can do it in Slovak because they have not been educated in Romani.” (A. K.)

“Little children will speak Romani if they remain with low education. By getting educated, they will lose Romani.” (A. K.)

“I think in Slovak because I was not educated in Romani. I obtained all my knowledge in Slovak. I learnt Romani only to a communicative level.” (A. K.)

The language behaviour in bilingual families changes also due to mixed marriages, in which husbands and wives, and parents and children communicate mostly in Slovak. This means that the users of the minority language adapt to the users of the majority language (usually not the other way round), especially if they do not live in a segregated Roma community, and they do so even if one parent and grandparents speak Romani:

“...older brothers and sisters all married non-Roma, and they speak Slovak both to their husbands and wives and to their children.” (A. K.)

“...and my granddaughter doesn't speak Romani because my daughter married a man who doesn't speak the language... And they spoke more Slovak than Romani to their children.” (J. V.)

Like in the past, many Roma nowadays stopped teaching their children Romani deliberately. They think that using both languages when speaking to their children is an obstacle to their future career. Even the parents who speak Romani or who speak Romani only partially due to their upbringing prefer the prestigious (dominant, majority) language when communicating with their children. Such families can thus gradually lose the original mother tongue:

In some cases (...) parents do not speak Romani to their children at all. (...) It is quite common that although parents speak Slovak to their children, they speak Romani to each other.¹⁷

I understand Romani, but I use it only occasionally. We speak Slovak to our children.¹⁸

I speak Romani only partially, so I don't use it. We speak Slovak to our children.¹⁹

However, unlike the above mentioned group of assimilated Roma, these Roma do not deny their Roma identity and still consider themselves Roma. They are not ashamed of their language, but they do not consider the knowledge of Romani as a decisive aspect of the Roma identity. In their opinion, the Roma who do not speak Romani can be equally good, if not better Roma than those who speak Romani:

"I know a lot of people who don't speak Romani, but they are more Roma than those who speak Romani." (J. V.)

*"I have friends who are **visibly** [emphasis added by the author] Roma but don't speak Romani. Some of them are my family; they don't speak Romani, but it doesn't matter."* (V. B.)

"A lot of Roma don't speak Romani. Most Roma speak only non-Romani today. /Despite that/ they are Roma and can feel like Roma." (D. M.)

However, some of them, even though they do not think it is necessary for Roma to speak Romani, still believe it would be appropriate if they did so:

"It is not necessary /to speak Romani/" ..., but "if you live in the community, it is only appropriate to speak Romani. Yet if you don't, you won't be renounced.... It is individual." (A. K.)

"You don't have to, but you could learn... The language hides the lives of Roma, a lot of traditions, Roma identity. As it is said, the language of each nationality hides a lot." (J. V.)

¹⁷ CINA, S., CINOVÁ, E. *Využitie rómskeho jazyka na 1. stupni ZŠ* [Using Romani in Junior Primary School], pp. 13–14.

¹⁸ PLEŠKOVÁ, E. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

¹⁹ BARTOŠOVÁ, A. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

As Roma we should speak Romani, but our parents didn't teach us, so Romani is barely used in our community. Most of us have only a partial command of Romani. For example, I understand nearly everything, but my speaking skills are very weak.²⁰

The Roma whose attitude towards their mother tongue supports the denial of the ideology of an essential link between one's ethnic identity and language usually live scattered among the non-Roma (Slovak- and Hungarian-speaking) population. Some of them still speak Romani, but they do not consider Romani their first language. It serves as a means of communication in the family or to facilitate communication with Roma.

I speak Romani, but I use it only at work to communicate with my clients. At home I use it only seldom, especially when we and our extended family get together.²¹

I hardly ever use Romani. I use some Romani expressions at work to directly refer to a situation and help my clients better to understand it.²²

For decades the Roma community's attitudes towards Romani and their language behaviour have developed in the spirit of the complex of the language ideologies entailed in the minority language ideology. Their attitudes were only little influenced by social changes in Slovakia in the 1960s when a handful of individuals under the influence of non-Roma activists strove to publish books in Romani. Romani, however, significantly benefited from the activities of the linguistic commission of the Gypsy-Roma Union, which codified the orthography of Romani based on Slovak in 1971.

National Minority Language Ideology

Compared to the previous periods, the beginning of the 1990s saw a certain shift in how Romani was used in Slovakia and in how some Roma viewed Romani. The year 1991 became a breakthrough. By the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic entitled *The Principles of Government Policy of the Slovak Republic towards Roma*, Roma officially gained the status of a national minority in the Slovak Republic. Based on this resolution, Romani

²⁰ BARTOŠOVÁ, A. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

²¹ OLÁH, J. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

²² OLÁH, V. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

obtained the same rights as the languages of the other national minorities in Slovakia. These are entrenched in *Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the State Language of the Slovak Republic* (No. 270/1995, amended by Act No. 125/2016) and in *Act on the Use of the Languages of National Minorities* (No. 184/1999, amended by Act No. 204/2011), and they are also regulated by *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (ratified by the Slovak Republic in 2001). The new status, at least theoretically, opened new possibilities for the Romani language. In the extent set forth by the applicable laws, it could become a language of the media, literature, communication in state institutions and it could also be used in education. Some members of the Roma cultural elite soon realized that the language can serve as a strategic means in their efforts to awaken a sense of belonging and equality in Roma and make them proud of their culture. Besides other things, they drew on the ideologies promoted in a wider European context by the European Union (for example, the ideology of children's right to be educated in their mother tongue). They were instrumental in the birth of the first literary works which, besides Slovak (or Hungarian), also feature Romani. Romani was at least sporadically used in the Roma periodical *Romano nevo lil* [The Romani new paper], which was established in 1993, and on the radio and on TV. The 1990s also saw the foundation of the Roma theatre *Romathan* (1992). There are organizations which support the use of Romani in literature (*Romano kher*).²³ Roma also began thinking about the use of Romani in education, and they presented their views, for example, at the seminar entitled *Rómsky jazyk – cesta sebaurčenia a sociálnej inklúzie* [Romani - A Way of Self-Determination and Social Inclusion].²⁴ Some members of the Roma cultural elite replace the ideology of an inferior minority language with the ideology of an equal national minority language.

Although these Roma know that many members of their national minority in Slovakia no longer speak Romani,²⁵ they promote a return to Romani,

²³ For more details about the use of Romani in new conditions, see RÁCOVÁ, A. *Uplatňovanie rómčiny ako jazyka národnostnej menšiny na Slovensku* [Introducing Romani as a National Minority Language in Slovakia], pp. 302–319.

²⁴ The contributions that were presented at the seminar were published in the proceedings *Rómsky jazyk – cesta sebaurčenia a sociálnej inklúzie* [Romani - A Way of Self-Determination and Social Inclusion], 2012.

²⁵ It is estimated that about 60% of over 402,840 Roma living in Slovakia speak Romani (according to the census, 122,518 inhabitants of Slovakia speak Romani as their first language) (MUŠINKA, A., ŠKOBLA, D., HURRE, J., MATLOVIČOVÁ, K., KLING, J. *Atlas rómskych komunit na Slovensku 2013* [The Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013]. Approximately 70% of them speak a Slovak variety of Romani; the others speak either a Hungarian or a Vlach variety of Romani.

emphasizing its importance. The language attitudes of this part of the cultural elite are in contradiction with the preferences of the other members of the Roma national minority. Despite the general trend to abandon Romani and the prevalent opinion among Roma that Romani is not an inevitable prerequisite of the Roma identity, they can see a link between one's language and ethnic identity. They say that Romani is part of the cultural heritage of the Roma minority, which is the pillar of their identity:

Romani is a strong symbol of our ethnic identity.²⁶

Romani is one of the most important elements of the consciousness of the Roma ethnic group.²⁷

Romani is not only a means of communication, but also a platform for culture and identity.²⁸

The Romani language is the activator of the national pride of Roma pupils and their parents and of their self-identification.²⁹

A sense of belonging to the Roma, i.e. ethnic self-identification, requires familiarising oneself with the respective culture, including its language. (...) Becoming aware of one's ethnic subjectivity and identity is simply impossible without one's own language.³⁰

The enforcement of such an ideology finds support in the international environment. The International Roma Union, which was established in Great Britain in 1971 as a global organization whose mission is the political representation of the Roma nation, the development of their culture and language, and the protection of Roma's human and civil rights, introduced common Roma symbols: a Roma flag and a Roma anthem. At the Fifth Congress, which was held in Prague in 2000, the representatives of Roma

²⁶ HERO, J. *Příklady dobré praxe při vyučování rómského jazyka a literatury* [Good Practice Examples in Teaching the Romani Language and Literature], p. 46.

²⁷ CINA, S., CINOVÁ, E. *Využitie rómskeho jazyka na 1. stupni ZŠ* [Using Romani in Junior Primary School], p. 5.

²⁸ HORVÁTHOVÁ, A. *Rómsky jazyk – bariéry a výzvy* [Romani Language – Barriers and Challenges], p. 4.

²⁹ SAMKO, M. *Poznámky k rómskemu jazyku v školách* [Notes on the Romani Language in Schools], p. 16.

³⁰ GODLA, F. *Ovplyvňuje (ne)využívanie posilňovania rómskej identity nízku vzdelanostnú úroveň rómskych žiakov?* [Does (non)Strengthening Roma Identity Influence the Low Education Level of Roma Pupils?], p. 25.

adopted *The Declaration of the Roma Nation*, proclaiming themselves a nation: “We are a nation, we have a common tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language.” They thus also subscribed to the one-nation-one-language ideology. This ideology is reflected in Roma’s belief that they can make themselves understood in Romani all over the world although real communication practices refute this belief. In many places Roma do not speak Romani at all. In places where it is spoken, Romani is significantly influenced by the lexis, and in many cases also by the grammar of the contact language/languages, which makes varieties of Romani mutually barely intelligible.³¹

In the socio-political situation after 1991, sometimes even the Roma who lost their language in the past have acquired new attitudes towards Romani and new language practices. There has been a shift from monolingualism to bilingualism,³² the main reason being the desire to find employment in new conditions, in contact with Roma or in institutions focused on Roma:

I have been using Romani at work for several years, but only occasionally... It wasn’t always like this. I didn’t learn it in the family, but I learnt it as a foreign language. Many people tell me that I speak a bit ‘differently’.³³

Another example of the reversing language shift is the efforts of the Roma who want to awaken ethnic awareness in the other members of the Roma national minority. They are convinced of the value of Romani, and they want to instil love for the language, especially in children.

“I have a granddaughter... and I was sitting with her while she was learning Romani words from books, and then she said, ‘Granny, a horse is graj’.” (J. V.)

I speak Romani, but I use it only seldom, because only very few people in our town speak the language. I am trying to speak Romani to the children I work with in our ensemble. I translate song lyrics for them, and my instructions are also in Romani. Many children often desperately look at me because they don’t

³¹ Compare ELŠÍK, V. *Tváře romštiny* [Faces of the Romani Language]. Available from <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravy/viktor-elsik-tvare-romstiny>.

³² Fishman speaks of “a reversing language shift”. Qtd. by DORIAN, N. *The Ambiguous Arithmetic of Language Maintenance and Revitalization*, p. 462.

³³ LUPTÁKOVÁ, J. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

understand what they are supposed to do, but in the course of time they pick up at least the basics of Romani this way.³⁴

The efforts of some members of the Roma cultural elite to achieve a real equality of the Roma nationality with the other national minorities in Slovakia included long-term efforts to standardize Romani. As a result, the basic national minority language ideology becomes coupled with the standard language ideology. Roma used this strategy to achieve the strengthening of their status as a national minority, who have their own fully functioning standard language. Since a standard language requires the existence of one correct set of language norms regulating its pronunciation, writing, and grammar,³⁵ a group of educated Roma activists produced the necessary publications: *Pravidlá rómskeho pravopisu s pravopisným a gramatickým slovníkom* [The Rules of Romani Orthography with a Spelling and Grammar Dictionary],³⁶ *Konverzačný lexikón rómskej gramatiky* [The Conversational Lexicon of Romani Grammar]³⁷ and *Romaňi čhib. Učebnica rómskeho jazyka* [Romaňi čhib. The Textbook of the Romani Language].³⁸ They drew on the codification of the Romani orthography from 1971. As a standard they chose one of the varieties of Romani, namely the Slovak variety (particularly its East Slovak dialect), which was the most thoroughly explored and described at the time of standardization in 2008. By this, the Slovak variety acquired (at least theoretically) a superior status over the other two varieties (the Hungarian variety and the Vlach variety). The Roma declared this standardized Romani to be the language of all Roma in Slovakia, ignoring the specific position of Vlach Romani. It can be said that they did so from the position of power, which had been derived from their status in the majority society rather than in the Roma society at that time, and with a particular political intention – to convince the superordinate (majority) political authorities that Romani is a fully functioning language, equal to the other (standardized) languages of the national minorities in Slovakia. Like the standardization of other languages, the standardization of Romani also leads to a

³⁴ OLÁHOVÁ, M. *Anketa* [Inquiry], p. 6.

³⁵ LANSTYÁK, I. *Jazykové ideológie (všeobecné otázky a glosár)* [Language Ideologies (General Issues and Glossary)], pp. 251–311.

³⁶ Team of authors. *Pravidlá rómskeho pravopisu s pravopisným a gramatickým slovníkom* [The Rules of Romani Orthography with a Spelling and Grammar Dictionary], 2006.

³⁷ ADAMOVIČ, E. *Konverzačný lexikón rómskej gramatiky* [The Conversational Lexicon of Romani Grammar], 2007.

³⁸ GAŠPAROVÁ, E., KOPTOVÁ, A., LUKÁČOVÁ, I. *Romaňi čhib. Učebnica rómskeho jazyka* [Romaňi čhib. The Textbook of the Romani Language], 2007.

contradiction of values,³⁹ as a result of which certain language forms are given precedence over others and are considered to be the only correct ones. The standardization thus made the language of the Roma who do not speak the East Slovak dialect second-rate not only in relation to the dominant national language, but also to the standard minority language. Moreover, the standardization of Romani has not been completed because there are no institutions, no schools, few periodicals, few media, few literary works which would promote, support, and spread standard Romani. Its spread is furthermore hampered by the insufficient knowledge of Romani among the national minority.

The fact that the standardization of Romani was expected to play a mobilization role and that many members of the Romani language community do not ascribe adequate importance to it (many even do not know that Romani has a standardized form) manifests itself in some Roma's attitudes towards the language. They continue using their own dialects in writing, which can be seen in orthography, lexis, and grammar, and they do so deliberately. Examples of this are the seventh anthology of Roma literature produced by the authors associated in the ROLIK club *Písanie je naše RÓMSTVO. Iriben hin amaro ROMIPEN* [Writing Is Our Roma Identity] and a collection for children *Nelkáčik. Nelkačiskos*:

The works of Pavla Cicková, Zlatica Rusová, Eva Plešková, Marián Boldi, Richard Nemeth, and Martin Fočár are in their original version with minor changes by proof-readers to preserve the Romani language and the specifics of dialects which are spoken in the locations where the authors come from.⁴⁰

Such an attitude is, however, considered wrong by other Roma. They believe that the standardized language should help all Roma in Slovakia understand television or radio broadcasts, periodicals, and literature in Romani:

“We can say that we want to speak our own language... even when we write books, when we work in the media, when we read poets, when we want to develop culture in our language. Nothing less and nothing more. I read a lot of books written by our writers and poets and I don't think the language is good... languagewise, the works aren't good... It's necessary to purify... purify the language and give it a standardized form. Without using too much of dialect.

³⁹ GAL, S. *Migration, Minorities and Multilingualism: Language Ideologies in Europe*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Available from <http://www.rolik.eu/zbierka.html>.

They say this is my dialect, I am a poet and I work in my dialect, but then he is understood only by a small group of people, the people from his region... It is important that as many Roma as possible understand what we write about ourselves, what we're leaving behind.” (J. V.)

“... I am all for speaking the standardized language where it is required, on television... At home I don't speak the way I do on television. Even those who speak Slovak, when they go somewhere, they won't speak their dialect, but they will speak proper Slovak, the official language, so that the others can understand. We also have an official Romani language, which needs to be cultivated, developed, spread among people, and this is a long process.” (J. V.)

The declaration of Romani as a standardized language occasioned quite exaggerated and naive (mobilization) statements, which attributed inadequate importance to the standard language:

The better the quality of our Romani, and the faster it spreads to settlements, towns, and villages in its standardized form, the faster we will see happen that Roma won't be afraid to acknowledge their ethnicity when Act No. 540/2001 on State Statistics is applied again in this country... when there is a census, also a census of Roma living in Slovakia!!!⁴¹

The Roma cultural elite who contributed to the standardization of Romani links the standard language ideology with the ideology of children's right to be educated in their mother tongue:

The standard language is necessary *“for Romani to get into schools, for children to be educated in their language, to use their language in the education process...” (A. K.)*

“Teaching must happen in the standardized Romani language. And if some Roma don't understand the standardized language, they should learn. They should learn Romani just like they learn Slovak.” (J. V.)

⁴¹ BALOG, M. *Ukázali nám cestu...* [They Showed Us the Way...], p. 3.

They, of course, realize that there are certain restrictions, which is attested to by the following opinions on the practical functioning of the standard language in the education of the community which is very diverse in terms of dialects:

“We must teach the standardized language. However, it shouldn’t be limited to the language of Roma from the east of Slovakia. It should be enriched with other dialects, but it isn’t happening intensively... The teacher should be competent enough to bring the standard language to a region where people don’t know about it or aren’t familiar with it. However, it is also necessary to try to understand a different Romani. The teacher should be ready to explain the difference in the vocabulary of different dialects.”
(A. K.)

The ideology of children’s right to be educated in their mother tongue is linked not only with the problem of the language of instruction (standardized or non-standardized), but also with Roma’s attitude towards the necessity of such education. Some Roma believe that it is not possible in current conditions due to the language skills of Roma pupils or due to the conditions created by the state:

Since the language competence both in Romani and Slovak in marginalized Roma communities is very low, it’s very difficult to introduce Romani into the education process. If it’s used at all, it’s used for basic instructions as to behaviour and similar.⁴²

We don’t think it is ideal to use Romani as a language of instruction because Slovak schools haven’t yet created good conditions for a full-fledged implementation of such a plan.⁴³

Some Roma are convinced of the opposite:

It is necessary to introduce Romani to schools with a higher percentage of Roma students. Particularly to schools attended only by Roma students because it is their mother tongue and means of communication they use in their families, it is the language which

⁴² GODLA, F. *Ovplyvňuje (ne)využívanie posilňovania rómskej identity nízku vzdelanostnú úroveň rómskych žiakov?* [Does (non)Strengthening Roma Identity Influence the Low Education Level of Roma Pupils?], p. 27.

⁴³ CINOVÁ, E. *Podiel ROCEPA pri implementácii rómskeho jazyka do vzdelávacieho procesu* [The Role of ROCEPO in the Implementation of Romani in Education], p. 22.

they understand, in which they think and learn and consolidate new information.⁴⁴

It is evident that the ideology of Roma children's right to be educated in their mother tongue did not find support with most Roma, even those who speak Romani. It is not only for the above mentioned reasons, but also due to the fact that like in the past, even today Romani is not a language which would help most Roma find employment in the Slovak Republic. Some Roma, however, think Romani should be taught at schools. In their view, it would not only increase the self-confidence of Roma but also change the majority population's attitude towards them.

Also by introducing the Romani language and literature into education, we can affect change in the majority's attitude towards Roma.⁴⁵

The attitude of most Roma who speak about this issue is rather pragmatic. They think that Romani should be at least a supporting language at schools which would enable Roma children's easier participation in education in Slovak.

Conclusions

For decades the Roma community's attitudes towards Romani and their language behaviour have developed in the spirit of the complex of the language ideologies entailed in the minority language ideology, which viewed Romani as an inferior language. A certain change happened after 1991 when Roma were officially recognized as a national minority in the Slovak Republic, and the minority language ideology was at least to a certain extent replaced/supplemented by the ideology of the national minority language, which is fully functioning and equal to the other languages in Slovakia. The fact that due to the change of the country's policies towards Roma, Romani acquired the status

⁴⁴ GAŠPAROVÁ, E. *Rómsky jazyk – prostriedok zlepšenia vzdelávania a uľahčenia vstupu rómskych detí do školy* [Romani Language - Means of Improving Roma Children's Education and Making the Beginning of Their School Attendance Easier], p. 32.

⁴⁵ FACUNA, J. *Vieme pripraviť učiteľov rómskeho jazyka a literatúry v podmienkach Slovenskej republiky?* [Can We Train Teachers of the Romani Language and Literature in Slovak Conditions?], p. 10.

of a national minority language, however, did not automatically mean a different attitude towards its usage in the whole Roma community. Our analysis of interviews and texts has shown that the Roma community and individual Roma have different opinions on their language and different communication practices. Most Roma still tend to lean away from Romani; however, some individuals do the opposite, especially to fulfil their work ambitions. Some members of the cultural elite try to awaken Roma's self-confidence by pointing to a link between the Romani language and the Roma nationality, but many Roma are not convinced of the existence of this link. The cultural elite are not sufficiently numerous, consistent, and united, and they are not supported by the other Roma. The standardization of Romani led to a decrease in its political mobilization. Although Roma authors produce books, they are written in Slovak rather than in Romani. Romani has a rather symbolic representation in press, on the radio, and on TV. Roma do not have a sufficient number of Roma readers and Roma listeners. Neither do Roma have the same opinion on education in Romani. Prevalent is the belief that Romani should serve as a supporting language to help pupils overcome the language barrier in education.

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