

Friedrich Schiller University Jena  
Semiotic Landscapes of Multilingual Border Regions  
November 9 – 10, 2023

# Romani language education in Serbia

MIRJANA MIRIĆ

INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES, SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS (BELGRADE)



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## Possibilities vs. reality

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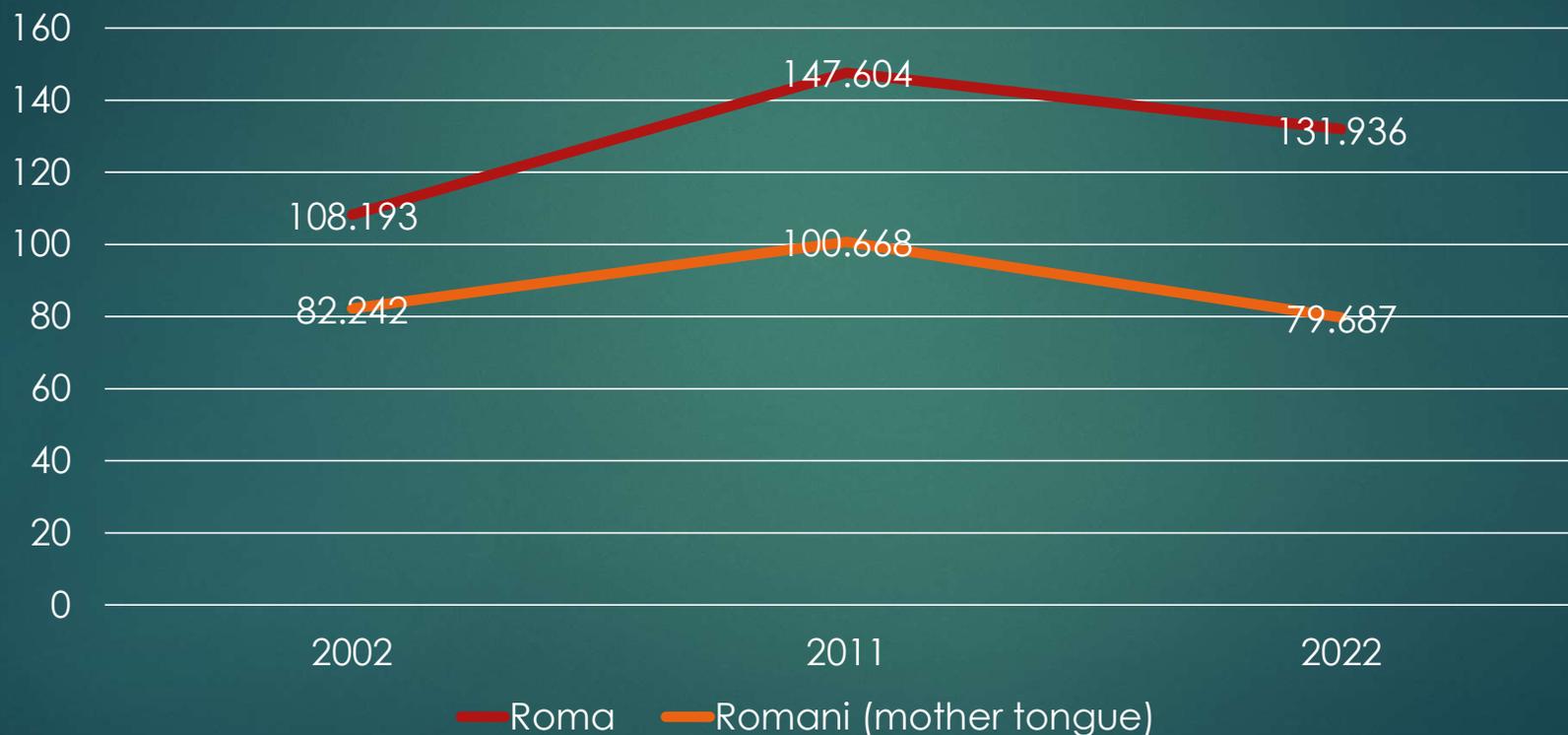
# Roma

- ▶ One of the major ethnic minorities in a large number of European countries
- ▶ Europe's largest transnational minority, a "non-territorial nation" of Europe
- ▶ App. between 7 and 8.5 million Gypsies or Roma living in Europe (Guy 2003: 48)
- ▶ The former Communist and Socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe

# Romani

- ▶ Indo-European (Indo-Aryan) language
- ▶ 3-4 million speakers worldwide
- ▶ 4 dialect groups: Balkan, Vlax, Central, Northern (Matras 2004, cf. Elšík 2020)
- ▶ Serbia: Balkan and Vlax dialects

# Census data (2002, 2011, 2022)



# Census data (2022)

The population aged 15 years and older by nationality and education

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Serbia	Total	Without schooling	Incomplete primary education	Primary education	High school education	Higher education	University degree	Unknown
<b>Overall</b>	5,691,551	57,667 1.01%	299,739 5.27%	1,013,067 17.8%	3,020,958 53.1%	344,056 6%	933,340 16.4%	22,724 0.4%
<b>Roma</b>	93,839	12,500 13.3%	23,073 24.6%	40,341 43%	16,667 17.8%	382 0.4%	736 0.8%	140 0.1%



80.9%

<https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/3104020307?languageCode=sr-Cyrl>

# Legislative framework

- ▶ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (2006)
- ▶ Constitution of the Republic of Serbia
- ▶ Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities
- ▶ Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts
- ▶ Law on the Foundations of the Education and Upbringing System
- ▶ Law on Preschool Education and Upbringing
- ▶ Law on Elementary Education and Upbringing
- ▶ Law on Secondary Education and Upbringing
- ▶ Law on Dual Education
- ▶ Law on Textbooks

# Legislative framework (education)

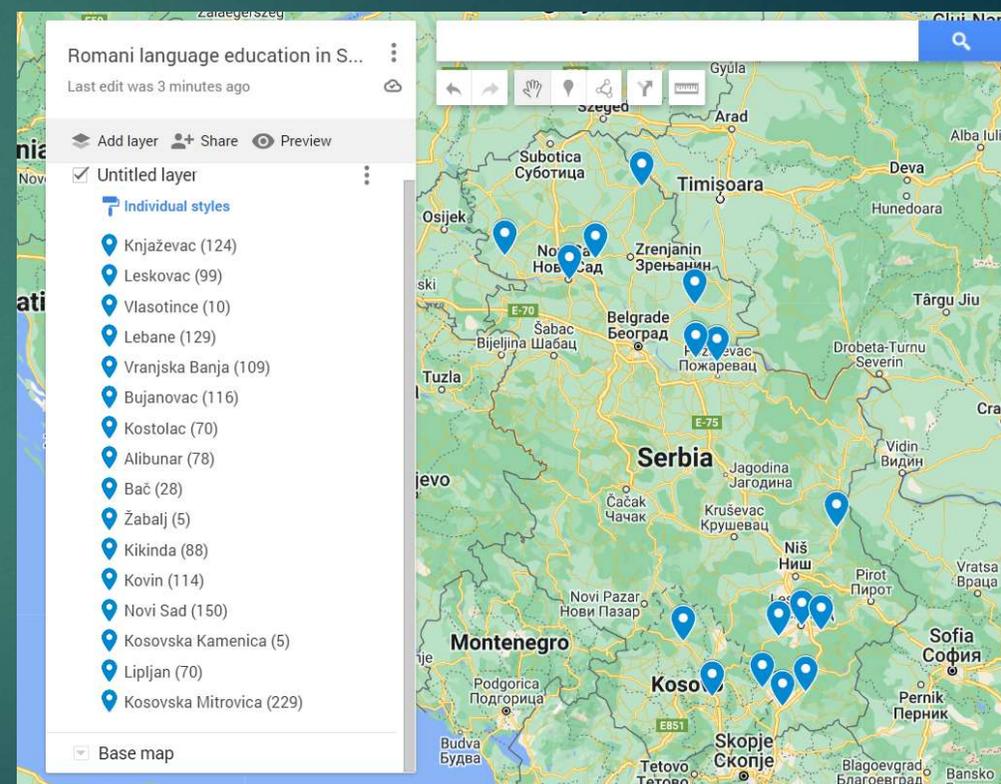
- ▶ Educational and upbringing activities for members of national minorities are conducted in the language, speech, and script of the national minority.
- ▶ Possibility of conducting educational and upbringing activities bilingually, in the language and script of the national minority and in the Serbian language.
- ▶ The school subject: Mother tongue/speech with elements of national culture.

# Legislative framework (education)

- ▶ Educational and upbringing activities for members of national minorities are conducted in the language, speech, and script of the national minority.
- ▶ Possibility of conducting educational and upbringing activities bilingually, in the language and script of the national minority and in the Serbian language.
  - ▶ Does not exist for minority languages (Filipović 2016, Filipović & Vučo 2018)
- ▶ The school subject: The Romani language with elements of national culture.

# Romani language with elements of national culture

- ▶ Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia
  - ▶ <https://opendata.mpn.gov.rs/otvoreni-podaci/osnovno-obrazovanje.html>
- ▶ 2023/2024
  - ▶ 1310 enrolled students
  - ▶ Only primary education
  - ▶ 16 towns



# Romani language with elements of national culture - issues

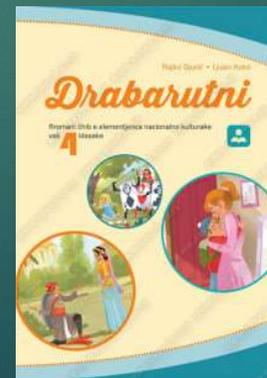
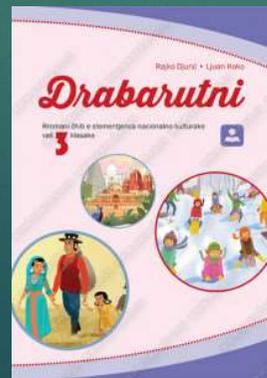
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- ▶ The town of Knjaževac (Eastern Serbia)
  - ▶ Ćirković & Mirić 2017, Sikimić (ed.) 2018, Mirić & Ćirković 2022, Mirić 2019, 2021
- ▶ Official data vs. Romani language teacher (interview, October 2023):
  - ▶ Primary school “Vuk Karadžić”: 12 students vs. 45 students
  - ▶ Primary school “Dimitrije Todorović Kaplar”: 112 students vs. 68 students
  - ▶ Primary school “Dubrava” (not reported in the official document): 22 students

# Textbooks

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- ▶ Catalogue of textbooks in languages of national minorities for preschools, primary and high schools for school year 2023/2024.
  - ▶ <https://prosveta.gov.rs/prosveta/udzbenici/udzbenici-na-jezicima-nacionalnih-manjina/>
- ▶ Romani language textbooks
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade (Đurić & Koko 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d)
- ▶ 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade (Đurić, Aleksandrović & Jovanović 2021, Aleksandrović & Đurić 2021)
- ▶ Only in the Gurbet (Southern Vlax) variety



# Fieldwork research data

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- ▶ Two projects:
- ▶ **VLingS: Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia, 2022–2024**
  - ▶ Funded by the Scientific Fund of the Republic of Serbia
- ▶ **DAAD: Semiotic Landscapes of Multilingual Border Regions, 2022–2023**
  - ▶ Funded by Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst: Programme of Project-related Personal Exchange (PPP) & Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of Serbia



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
Nemačka služba za akademsku razmenu



Science Fund  
of the Republic of Serbia



# VLingS Questionnaire

- ▶ Sociolinguistic questionnaire investigating the linguistic vulnerability of several minority linguistic varieties in Serbia (including Romani): <https://vlings.rs/>
- ▶ Administered in Serbian: pilot version (app. 190 Qs) and main version (app. 150 Qs)
- ▶ **15 sections:** Language usage, language acquisition and intergenerational language transmission, domains of usage, literacy, **education**, institutional support and linguistic landscape, publications, media, religious service, cultural manifestations, self-evaluation of language competencies, language attitudes, ethnic and cultural identity, **language preservation and revitalization**, demographic information

# VLingS Questionnaire

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- ▶ My own data (90 Roma respondents)
- ▶ **Pilot version** (fieldwork 2022): **34 respondents**
  - ▶ Banat region (Bavanište, Zrenjanin, Dolovo), Knjaževac (Eastern Serbia), Belgrade (Bežanijska Kosa, Ledine)
- ▶ **Main research** (fieldwork 2023): **56 respondents**
  - ▶ Bavanište (Banat region), Batajnica (suburban settlement in Belgrade)
- ▶ Questions on **Education** (Section 5) – 7 questions
- ▶ Questions on **Language preservation and revitalization** (Section 14) – 7 questions
- ▶ Only the questions which overlapped in both versions of the questionnaire are analyzed.

# Participants

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- ▶ Participants' linguistic background
  - ▶ 93.3% - bilingual in Romani and Serbian
  - ▶ 80% - consider Romani as their mother tongue
- ▶ Nationality:
  - ▶ 93.3% - Roma
- ▶ Education level:
  - ▶ 50% - without schooling or with incomplete primary school
  - ▶ 34.4% - primary school degree



# Analysis: Section 5 (Education)

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- ▶ 50% answered that there is a subject in schools where the Romani language is studied (in Serbia).
- ▶ 5.6% (N=5) studied Romani in school
  - ▶ for 4, 5 or 6 years
  - ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade, or at various levels of education
- ▶ 23.3% (N=21) had a family member who studied Romani in school
  - ▶ 3.3% - parents, 15.6% - children, 2.2% - grandchildren, 2.2% - other family members.
- ▶ 38.9% answered that there is a possibility to study Romani outside of school.

## Analysis: Section 14 (Language preservation and revitalization)

- ▶ 23.3% answered that there are some activities in their surroundings related to preserving or revitalizing Romani.
- ▶ 7.7% (N=7) mentioned that these activities include Romani language classes in school.
- ▶ 58.9% said that they would like for these activities to be introduced.
  
- ▶ 90% answered that it is important for them to preserve Romani.
- ▶ 87.8% answered that it is important to transmit Romani to younger generations.
- ▶ 71.1% answered that it is important to introduce or keep Romani in schools.
- ▶ 13.2% mentioned introducing Romani in school as a means to preserve Romani.

# Interim summary

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## ► VLingS Questionnaire



Photos: Svetlana Ćirković

# DAAD fieldwork in Banat



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
Nemačka služba za akademsku razmenu

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- ▶ Interview with the president of the local Roma Association in Bavanište
- ▶ October 2022



- ▶ The pedagogical assistant from the primary school in Bavanište did not respond to my message and e-mail asking to organize an interview (October 2023).

# Issues: Which Romani is taught?

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- ▶ There is a significant difference between the Romani language taught in schools and the variety spoken in particular places.
- ▶ The president of the local Roma Association in Bavanište:
  - ▶ It is “banatski romski” that should be taught in school.
  - ▶ The curriculum for the school year should come from Banat.
- ▶ The Romani language teacher for Knjaževac (Mirić 2019):
  - ▶ 3 varieties are spoken in Knjaževac, while only one of them is taught in school (without including specific features or vocabulary of the local variety)
- ▶ Negative effects on children and their perception of their own variety.

# Other issues

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- ▶ Lack of a sufficient number of qualified teaching staff
- ▶ Parents are not informed about the possibility of enrolling their children in Romani language classes

# Concluding remarks

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- ▶ A discrepancy between the officially promoted, explicit language educational policies and their implementation
- ▶ The need to develop and recognize **bottom-up language education policies**, based on the needs of local and regional stakeholders (Filipović 2016, Filipović & Vučo 2018, Halwachs 2020)

Thank you!

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- ▶ VLingS: Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia, 2022–2024
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- ▶ Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, Belgrade

