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The Standardization of a Stateless Language

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24.1 Introduction

The study of language standardization has traditionally been linked to the activities of state agencies in regulating the status and approved corpus of officially recognized language varieties (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997) and to the sociolinguistic processes that are trigged by state-sponsored initiatives with consequences for the linguistic behaviour of individuals and collectives (Spolsky 2003). More recently, research on language policy and planning (LPP) has been giving greater consideration to measures taken at local and regional levels beyond state-sponsored activities, including the role of single actors in shaping 'micro-policy' in local institutions (Liddicoat & Baldauf 2008; Chua & Baldauf 2011; Davies & Ziegler 2015; Siiner et al. 2017). Post-colonial research frameworks have offered critical approaches to the role of state agency in language planning and identity building (cf. Anderson 1983; Crowley 2003; Wright 2004). Attention has been drawn to the way in which language codification serves as a means of granting legitimacy to a claim for nationhood (cf. Jaffe 1999; Joseph 2004) and how the notion of uniformity in language is used as a symbol for similarities among individual user populations and thus for the essence of a shared identity (cf. Edwards 2006). The exceptional example of Modern Hebrew revitalization or 'vernacularization' (Nahir 1998) is one of the most obvious cases of the use of language planning to link nationhood with territorialization, serving in effect as a prerequisite for statehood (cf. Kuzar 2001; Safran 2005). By contrast, the standardization of languages like Mauritian Creole through online platforms (Rajah-Carrim 2009) shows how, in the past few decades, language planning has become a process that can reinforce vernacular identities and can be autonomous of state institutions, a product of globalization and a 'post-nationalist' era (Heller 2011).

In Matras and Reershemius (1991), we introduced the notion of 'standardization beyond the state', examining the cases of three languages

(Yiddish, Kurdish and Romani) where state-sponsored initiatives played only a minor role in the drafting and implementing of policy and planning due to the transnational and/or geographical dispersion of the speaker populations and the absence of states that embrace these languages as national emblems of sovereignty. The factors that impacted on the success of bottom-up, non-state standardization initiatives were the extent of geographical cohesion (with Kurdish and pre-war Yiddish showing greater regional concentration than Romani), native literacy traditions (present in Yiddish, but not in Kurdish or Romani), the mobilization potential of nationalist movements (found in pre-war Yiddish among supporters of the 'Bund', but limited in Kurdish to intellectuals in exile and in Romani to a small circle of intellectuals), as well as opportunities to set up autonomous education facilities (promoted for Yiddish by the 'Bund' in pre-war Eastern Europe, but limited for Romani to a local and short-lived initiative in the early Soviet Union, and largely absent for Kurdish until the late 1990s).

In all three cases, standardization efforts benefitted from interaction between activists and academics, but received most of their momentum from the initiatives and leadership of individuals. A key feature of non-state standardization was found to be the absence of a hierarchical relationship between drafting and implementing agencies and the reliance instead on organic networking among a diverse set of players. In particular, non-state standardization tends to show pluralism of form and structure, contrasting with the uniformity that is an inherent goal in state-sponsored standardization. As I argue in Matras (1999), in the non-state context, the very act of engaging in standardization efforts is emblematic and can carry with it a mobilizing momentum that serves identity-forging functions even without the adoption of a centralized, uniform norm. Non-state standardization can thus be regarded as a process of multi-actor networking that is characterized by the creation and use of a plurality of forms to promote language as a way of valorizing national or ethnic identity.[1]

24.2 Romani-Speaking Communities

Romani is spoken by geographically dispersed minorities primarily in Central and Eastern Europe in distinct but closely related dialectal varieties. Populations that speak Romani usually use the term *Roma* or one of its derivations (such as *rom* for 'husband', *romanes* as the name of the language or *romano* as an adjective denoting group-internal practices) as a self-appellation, often alongside other group-specific designations such as *Sinte* or *Kaale* or subgroup denominations that pertain to geographical region

[1] This is not the place to engage in a discussion of the meaning of national or ethnic identity (but see below with particular reference to Romani identity) other than to mention that the 'Bund' promoted a narrative of a secular Eastern European Jewish identity, for which Yiddish was a key emblem, while Kurdish nationalism flags both regional identities and the links among Kurdish-speaking populations across several state borders.

or historical trade specialization (e.g. *Polska Roma* ('Polish Roma'), *Kelderaša* ('Coppersmiths')). The Indo-Aryan origin of Romani was established already in the late eighteenth century. Since then, comparative dialect surveys have allowed researchers to reconstruct key patterns of change and dialect differentiation (see Matras 2002; Elšík & Matras 2006). The emerging picture is that of a more or less uniform 'Early Romani' that was spoken in contact with Byzantine Greek from around the eleventh or twelfth century onwards by descendants of migrants from the Indian Subcontinent who specialized in an itinerant service economy, some of whom may have been camp followers of the Seljuk armies or possibly slaves, though the historical circumstances remain unclear. The language was then carried into Central Europe from the late fourteenth century onwards by small groups of migrants, possibly triggered by the decline of the Byzantine Empire. As these groups settled across Europe, their speech forms altered as a result of diverse contact influences as well as internal changes.

The structural outcomes of these changes tend to form geographical isoglosses, which indicate that the developments occurred *in situ*, following settlement in the various regions. This also suggests that itineracy ('travelling') was in most cases confined within the boundaries of particular regions. Early written attestations of Romani from the late sixteenth century onwards, all compiled by external observers, show a picture of dialect differentiation that is quite similar to that found today. A bundle of isoglosses that represent internal (rather than contact-induced) changes separate the dialects of North-Western Europe from those of the south-east, roughly following the frontier that separated the Austrian from the Ottoman empires in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. All of this suggests that dialect differentiation in Romani began to emerge immediately after the settlement of Romani migrant populations in the various regions, taking shape during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. With the exception of some outliers, Romani dialects tend to preserve the same inflection paradigms and inherited basic vocabulary but show differences in phonology and especially in prosody, different paths of paradigm renewal and grammaticalization around some classes of function words such as deictic expressions and the use of derivational morphology and considerable reliance on loanwords from the respective contact languages in both content and grammatical vocabulary.[2]

There are no reliable figures on numbers of speakers, but Romani is clearly one of the major non-state languages of Europe, with upwards of 3–4 million speakers. There are also speaker communities of significant sizes in the United States and a number of Latin American countries including Mexico, Columbia, and Argentina. Dialects of Romani are as closely related and perhaps even more closely related to one another than those of

[2] For an overview of structural variation in Romani dialects, see Matras (2002), as well as the Romani Morpho-Syntax (RMS) Database (http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/rms).

other European languages that show considerable geographical variation such as German or Italian. The varieties used by the majority of Romani speakers are probably mutually intelligible once speakers try to accommodate and avoid code-switching and word insertions from the various contact languages.

Confusion is sometimes triggered by the reference, in some texts, to Romani 'language-s', in the plural. This is reinforced by the frequent use of the term 'Roma' in the discourse of European political institutions since the mid-1990s as a cover term for populations of various origins that specialized historically in itinerant service economies, including those that do not speak Romani and are not historically related to the descendants of itinerant groups of Indian origin, such as the Irish Travellers or the *Gens du Voyage* of France. Other populations may have spoken Romani in previous generations but have abandoned the language except for a Romani-derived vocabulary of limited scope, often around 300–400 words; they include the Romani Gypsies of England, the Scandinavian *Resande* and the *Gitanos* of Spain and Portugal. Others still, such as the *Jenische* of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, make use of special vocabularies that are partly of Romani origin and may have formed as a result of convergence of Romani and non-Romani populations. All of these are not considered to be dialects of Romani (notwithstanding the fact that some, such as the Romani Gypsies of England, refer to their in-group vocabulary as 'Romani'; cf. Matras 2010).

24.3 Early Standardization Initiatives: Proof of Concept

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Romani was used exclusively in face-to-face oral communication, predominantly in the family domain or among interlocutors who were personally familiar with one another, or among neighbours in segregated Romani settlements in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Aside from research-orientated documentation, which began by as early as the mid-sixteenth century, Romani writing first appeared in print in the form of an experimental Gospel translation produced by German missionaries in the late 1800s. A popular Romani literacy project was first introduced in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s as part of a comprehensive policy to utilize minority languages to support education and ideological mobilization. The initiative came from a circle of Romani performers whose trades had been banned after the revolution and who sought an alternative role for themselves by promoting Romani culture in a way that would be acceptable to state authorities (cf. O'Keeffe 2013). They lobbied state institutions successfully to set up Romani language school classes and to translate educational materials and ideological and literary texts. The variety of Romani used was the North Russian Romani dialect (cf. Sergievski 1931) and the writing system was adopted from Russian. The initiative was discontinued after just a few years; little is known about the

extent to which Romani literacy was actively embraced by speakers of the language, though in 2005, the Rombiblio Project documented some 400 Romani book titles that had been published during this period (see also Marushiakova & Popov 2017).

The Soviet practice set the model for what was to become the common pattern of country-based literacy in Romani. An initiative to promote Romani literacy was launched in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968 by a union of Romani writers, who adopted the East Slovak Romani dialect and a writing system based on Czech and Slovak (Hübschmannová & Neustupný 1996). It followed the Soviet Romani orthographic principle and academic transliteration conventions in adopting grapheme combinations such as {ph} (represented as {пх}, etc., in the Cyrillic system} for distinctive aspiration of stops. Romani literacy initiatives continued to spread in the 1970s but remained limited to small circles of activists and academics. A Romani alphabet was drafted in Finland in the early 1970s for the local Finnish Romani dialect, making use of academic transliteration symbols such as {č, š, ž}. A Romani reader for schoolchildren was produced in Sweden in 1979, using the Kelderash dialect of Eastern European Romani migrants who had settled in Sweden in the late nineteenth century and also employing academic transliteration symbols. In the USA, Christian missionary organizations began distributing leaflets and Gospel translations in Kelderash Romani in the 1970s using an orthography based on English and in some cases on academic transliteration conventions. In Macedonia, a prescriptive Romani grammar appeared in 1980, propagating the use of either of two local Romani dialects, Arli and Džambazi/Gurbet, in the Roman rather than in the Cyrillic script. Elsewhere, in Yugoslavia, text production in Romani is attested sporadically from the 1980s among culture activists. In Hungary, teaching and learning materials and text compilations for non-academic audiences first appeared in the local Lovari Romani dialect in the late 1980s in an orthography that distinctively used 'international' (English-based) combination graphemes {ch, sh, zh} for the palato-alveolar sounds, in contrast to Hungarian {cs, s, zs}.

In most cases, these initiatives reached only a very small number of individuals and did not make any substantial contribution to regulating or even altering language use in Romani apart from the design of orthographic conventions. But they established the principle of Romani literacy and its recognition by institutions including academics and government agencies, and so they might be regarded as proofs of concept of the potential vitality of Romani beyond its traditional domains of use. They also established the model of networks of collaborators involving Romani community activists, non-Romani professionals and sometimes officials, as well as the principle of selecting a local or country-based dialect (or dialects) for codification using a bespoke local orthography, in some cases based on that of the state language, in others seeking an international orientation with the implicit aim of reaching international Romani audiences and

giving the Romani writing system a distinctive appearance. This strategy combines convergence to the local state language for reasons of convenience and practical access with divergence from it for the purpose of symbolic uniqueness, comprehensive representation of the sound system and professional appearance.

24.4 Standardization as a 'National Project'

Parallel to these emerging, decentralized literacy practices in Romani, a discussion began in the early 1970s surrounding the creation of an international Standard Romani language. This was part of an emerging international network of Romani political activists known as the International Romani Union (IRU)[3] (see Kochanowski 1989; Hancock 1991; Kenrick 1996). At a conference in Sarajevo in 1986, French language activist Marcel Cortiade (also Courthiade, Kortiade, Kurtiade) put forward a proposal for an international alphabet that included the meta-graphemes {θ, ʒ, q, ă, ĕ, ć, ś} to capture cross-dialectal phonological variation and in some cases morpho-phonological variation (cf. Courthiade 1989, 1992). Thus, {q}, for instance, captures the difference between the pronunciation of the dative case ending in *les-ke* ('for him') and *len-ge* ('for them'), spelled *lesqe* and *lenqe*, respectively. This writing system, along with a series of neologisms created by the same author, first appeared in print in the Romani abstracts of contributions to the Sarajevo conference proceedings volume (Balić et al. 1989).

An assembly of around thirty delegates at the IRU's Fourth World Romani Congress held in Warsaw in April 1990 adopted Cortiade's alphabet as the official 'standard' Romani. Its author and his followers continue to refer to this writing system and the pool of neologisms and grammatical conventions that accompany it as 'Standard Romani' today. Cortiade and his associates produced a handful of dictionaries and readers, but their distribution has remained limited. The most influential supporter of Cortiade's concept to date is Gheorghe Sarău, an official of the Romanian Education Ministry, who introduced Cortiade's alphabet and vocabulary preferences for use in a national Romani-language curriculum in Romania in the early 1990s. According to some reports,[4] Sarău trained several hundred teachers in the use of this 'Standard Romani', and many were deployed as Romani language teachers in state schools across the country. It is likely that many thousands of Romanian pupils were at one point or another exposed to this version of 'Standard Romani'. However, there is no documentation of any

[3] For a general account of the IRU's political lobbying activities, see Klimová-Alexander (2005).

[4] Toma (2013) reports that a total of 254 teachers taught Romani language in a total of 230 schools across Romania between 2009 and 2011. Gheorghe Sarău (personal communication, 21 October 2013) puts the total number of those who enrolled on the Romani Language Diploma course at Bucharest University since it opened in 1999 at 1,100 and the total number of graduates at 360. Mihaela Zatreanu (personal communication, 23 October 2013) reports that between ten and fifteen textbooks in Romani were produced by the Romanian Education Ministry and estimates the number of pupils who had Romani-language instruction at schools at around 31,000.

actual use of the concept, either privately or in public, save in the textbooks produced by Sarău and his collaborators at the Ministry, and thus there is no evidence that 'Standard Romani' plays any role at all outside a relatively modest number of classrooms. Elsewhere, Cortiade's 'standard' has found a handful of supporters among Romani activists in Albania and Macedonia as well as in Spain, where it was adopted by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Presencia Gitana in a Romani-language textbook published in 2012 (Jiménez & Cañadas 2012).

There are a few other language-engineering efforts. In Spain, former parliamentarian Juan de Dios Ramirez Heredia, of Gitano origin, developed a language that he called 'Rromanó-Kaló' after the Romani-derived vocabulary that is used by the Gitanos in Spain, known as Caló. Heredia's invented language consists of Romani vocabulary picked from a variety of contemporary dialects with simplified inflectional morphology and neologisms that are calqued on Spanish lexemes. Heredia promoted his language through websites, printed materials and a magazine, *Nevipens Romani*, which appeared regularly in the early 1990s. In Denmark, Kosovo-born Romani activist Selahetin Kruezi developed another 'Standard Romani' based on the Arli Romani dialect (spoken in the Balkans) and drawing on Albanian orthography, which he has been using since 2003 in a series of teaching and learning materials (none of which has been reported to be in use in any education facility); the concept gained popularity exclusively among a small group of Romani activists based in Prizren in Kosovo. The Romanian Romani activist Alin Dosoftei, writing under the name 'Desiphral', propagated the use of the Devanagari script for Romani between 2007 and 2011, and even maintained an entire section in this form of Romani on Wikipedia until it was shut down by the resource's editorial team in 2012 following disputes with other Romani activists.

Common to all of these enterprises is the fact that each is the brainchild of an individual who has endeavoured to build a group of followers in the declared pursuit of the unification of the Romani people through standardization of their language. All of the models stand out in their divergence from conventional choices – be it through Cortiade's system of metanotations, Heredia's engineered grammar and vocabulary, Kruezi's highly localized choice of Albanian orthography or Desiphral's Devanagari-based system – capitalizing on the symbolism of difference as a way of rallying Romani distinctiveness.

24.5 Post-1990 Standardization: Agents, Sponsors and Audiences

The fall of communism and growing political awareness of the plight of Roma in Eastern Europe, triggered in part through east–west migrations post-1990 (cf. Matras 2013), led to an expansion of Romani cultural and political activism across the continent and to responses from government

stakeholders. In Sweden, the state-run agency for teaching and learning publications Skolverket produced a series of readers in a variety of Romani dialects including those of Romani immigrants from Finland and from the Balkans, while Swedish state radio (Sveriges Radio) maintains a regular online programme in Romani (equally multidialectal) and state funding has been provided for the training of Romani mother tongue teachers and for a 'language commission' that consults on these various activities and pursues an explicit policy of multidialect codification. In Finland, the state-funded Research Institute for the Languages of Finland launched a project in 1996 to produce Romani teaching and learning materials, to support radio broadcasts in the language and to train teachers (Granqvist 2006). In Austria, government grants were made available to a research team at Graz University from the mid-1990s to create learning resources in several varieties of Romani, including the endangered dialect of the Burgenland Roms (Halwachs 2005, 2012). In Macedonia, a state-sponsored Romani Language Standardization Conference took place in November 1992, and the use of Romani in the public domain has since expanded into printed and broadcast media (Friedman 2005). The early 1990s also saw a proliferation of magazines and newsletters in Romani (often in bilingual editions), as well as educational materials produced by Romani NGOs in various countries. A compilation produced as part of the RomIdent project in 2011 lists over 130 titles of pedagogical publications in Romani (not including academic reference works and translations) that appeared in print between 1990 and 2011.[5]

The agents of Romani language activities since the early 1990s have been Romani as well as non-Romani activists and professionals, who act as translators and authors of language materials. Their contributions depend on the availability of sponsors but less so on dissemination, since few Romani-language materials have regular audiences and almost none are marketed commercially. Instead, the use of Romani in print and even in the classroom might be viewed as largely emblematic. Its primary impact on target audiences is to show that Romani literacy is possible and in this way to valorize Romani identity. Romani literacy is also a project that offers career opportunities to those who are able to secure sustainable links with sponsors. Such sponsorship has been provided by government agencies that award grants via NGOs or through academic institutions, and by European Union agencies and private foundations. George Soros's Open Society Foundations have had considerable impact, as did their subsidiary Next Page Foundation, which ran a dedicated programme to promote Romani literacy between 2002 and 2007.

The same sponsors have also been enabling networking of Romani activists through conferences, training events, lobbying meetings as well as various community projects. The emerging Romani NGO sector has largely

[5] See http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/virtuallibrary.

embraced Romani as the language of verbal interaction and to some extent also of correspondence and of occasional memos and manifestos, contributing to the creation of a new domain of semi-formal language use – Romani as a working language of grassroots-level political institutions – albeit one that lacks any central regulation (though it often provides fertile ground for the dissemination of spontaneous neologisms, especially political terminology). Institutional support for a micro- and meso-level language policy has been provided by the introduction, already in the early 1990s, of regular conference interpreting in Romani. To this day, there is no accredited training in Romani interpreting, but multilateral organizations such as the Council of Europe, various European Union agencies and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) draw on a list of interpreters who are contracted on a regular basis for individual events, despite their lack of formal qualifications. In this way, Romani has been de facto added to the portfolio of interpreting provisions at multinational conferences that deal with Romani issues, on ad hoc terms. Here, too, there is no regulation of form, and interpreters are entrusted with devising their own solutions to respond to needs.

Another institutional setting in which the use of Romani has been flourishing is the Romani Pentecostal movement, which has gained considerable momentum across Europe and the Americas since the early 1990s. This movement adapts evangelical principles to the specific practices of Romani communities, constituting in effect an ethnic-cultural revival enterprise as much as a religious one and opening up public spaces for the display of Romani identity. Language is, in this context, both an emblem of that enterprise and a practical means of communication among the different local groups of worshipers and their leaders, who are dispersed but tightly networked across different countries. New uses of Romani in this context include public sermons, recorded audiovisual messages distributed on CDs, as well as websites and social media, and individual face-to-face missionary conversations, all of which are characterized by the adoption and rapid dissemination of neologisms pertaining to evangelical terminology.

Both the political movement and the Pentecostal movement have created incentives for many Roms who were not brought up in Romani to acquire the language in order to assert their sense of belonging, and in some cases in order to take advantage of career opportunities offered within the framework of Romani NGOs and evangelical missionary networks (see Matras 2010: 162–5, 2015: 309).

24.6 The Role of Multinational Organizations

European institutions began to take an interest in the status of the Romani people in the late 1960s, when the Council of Europe took initiatives to regulate caravan sites and education provisions for travelling populations. The

first explicit mention of the 'Romani language' did not appear until 1983, when the Council of Europe's Council of Cultural Co-Operation recommended that 'the Romany language and culture be used and accorded the same respect as regional languages and cultures and those of other minorities'. The first substantive breakthrough in the recognition of Romani was the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1203 'On Gypsies in Europe' from 1992, which called for the establishment of 'a European programme for the study of Romanes and a translation bureau specialising in the language', and it recommended that 'the provisions for non-territorial languages as set out in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages should be applied to Gypsy minorities'. In February 2000, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in its Recommendation 2000/4 'On the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe' stated: 'In countries where the Romani language is spoken, opportunities to learn in the mother tongue should be offered at school to Roma/Gypsy children'. The European Commission made a practical contribution by funding, in the early 1990s, a number of working groups led by Marcel Cortiade on behalf of the IRU to compile a dictionary and other educational resources in 'Standard Romani'. The Council of Europe, too, supported the practical promotion of Romani-language teaching through a series of expert consultations, calling on state governments to increase awareness of the Romani language in the school context (Council of Europe 2003) and to help Romani pupils overcome social barriers by communicating with them in Romani (Rus 2004). None of these resolutions has any legally binding power, and few if any were followed by the governments of Member States, but they have contributed to raising awareness of the Romani language and granting political legitimacy to requests by activists to introduce measures to support the language, while also acknowledging the Roma as a linguistic minority.

In 2005, the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division commissioned a report on the status of Romani in Europe, which recommended support for the prevailing trend towards pluralism of form and structure (Matras 2005). For the first time, Romani was put directly on the agenda of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, whose expert committee adopted the view that the absence of a unified standard should not prevent Member States from supporting Romani language educational facilities. It also called for support from European institutions to produce teaching and learning materials in local dialects, thereby embracing the principle of linguistic pluralism in standardization.[6] The Council of Europe then proceeded to create a European Curriculum Framework for Romani (CFR), which was published in 2008.[7] Two implementation projects funded

[6] Council of Europe, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Committee of Experts, MIN-LANG (2006) 3, Strasbourg, 6 March 2006. Report on Hearing with the Language Policy Division (Council of Europe), 5 October 2005, p. 8.

[7] Council of Europe, Language Policy Division, A Curriculum Framework for Romani, developed in cooperation with the European Roma and Travellers Forum, 2008. www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Rom_CuFrRomani2008_EN.pdf.

by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme have since worked towards the creation of teaching and learning materials for Romani based on the CFR: RomaniNet (2009–12),[8] which produced an online animated Romani-language course, and QualiRom (2011–13), which produced teaching materials and teacher training packs in six different dialects of Romani for use in primary and secondary schools.[9]

The European Parliament has since called for practical measures such as 'increasing the number of Roma teachers and ensuring the protection of the language and identity of Roma children by making education available in their own language',[10] and the European Commission has called on Member States to 'offer Roma pupils instruction in their mother tongue, upon parents' request'.[11] In response to the European Commission's call for 'National Strategies for Roma Inclusion' in 2011, a number of states reported on measures taken to support Romani-language education provisions.[12] Some fifteen states have also recognized Romani as a minority language under the framework of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which mentions Romani explicitly as a 'non-territorial language'. Most, however, limit recognition to Part II of the Charter ('General Principles') and a minimum of practical measures under Part III, which usually include the provision of adult education opportunities, steps to ensure the teaching of the history of the community of speakers and provisions to train teachers to deliver the first two measures. Even where there is a notional commitment within the framework of the Charter to guarantee education in Romani, implementation is usually found to be lacking, as evidenced by reports issued by the Committee of Experts that oversees the Charter between 2001 and 2011 (cf. Halwachs et al. 2013: 42–50).

Nonetheless, European institutions have created an impetus for public recognition of Romani and in some cases provided practical support in the form of sponsored expertise and project funding. In 2015, the Council of Europe introduced 'International Romani Language Day' on 6 November, and its annual communications relating to that day are translated on its website into Cortiade's 'Standard Romani' (while other Romani translations of Council of Europe communications and documents appear in various other forms of Romani). Elsewhere, the day has been marked by events and public declarations, and Poland and Croatia have even issued postage stamps to mark it.

Significantly, many of the European communications on Romani issued since 2005 enshrine the principle of pluralistic, local and dialect-specific standardization that has been practised in recent decades, in this way

[8] www.romaninet.com

[9] http://qualirom.uni-graz.at

[10] European Parliament, Resolution of 9 March 2011 on the EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion, para. 4.

[11] European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, General Policy Recommendation No. 13 'On combatting anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma', 24 June 2011, section 4(n).

[12] http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/national-strategies/

adapting the very concept of standardization to the sociolinguistic reality of Romani. European institutions effectively practise the same principle in allowing various written and verbal forms of the language to be used on websites and in conference interpreting side by side, and by supporting diverse language initiatives that promote different, localized standardization concepts.

24.7 The Role of the Masses: Electronic Communication

If the emergence of Romani printed publications served to set a signal that Romani-language literacy is possible, then the spread of online electronic communication in the language constitutes the actual realization of Romani literacy as a widespread practice. Romani presence on the Internet began in the mid-1990s when email correspondence among Romani activists proliferated and Romani NGOs began to receive funding to create websites. These forums encouraged public use of written Romani for new content and functions and licensed distanced exchange in writing among interlocutors who were not personally acquainted with one another and were often users of different dialects and different second languages (on which they typically draw for orthographic conventions and loanwords), thus supporting the trend towards pluralistic and unregulated language use in writing.

Between November 2010 and November 2011, the RomIdent project[13] archived a sample of computer-mediated communication in Romani. The corpus included Romani-language websites, contributions to online newsletters and viewers' comments in Romani on YouTube videos. Contributions to newsletters and discussion lists included announcements about cultural and political lobbying activities, reports on publications and meetings, greetings, eulogies and occasionally poems. Announcements rarely triggered replies. They tended to be linguistically coherent, each reflecting a single author's dialect and choice of orthography, while the assembled corpus as a whole gave a mixed picture of dialectal and orthographic pluralism. Users often exchanged greetings around holiday times such as Christmas, New Year, Easter, Herdelezi (St George's Day) and Ramadan, and those provided a nice illustration of variation in spelling and structure as different users repeated similar phrases in a dense sequence. Discussions on the newsletters during the monitoring period revolved mainly around political initiatives by Romani NGOs and pertinent issues in Romani culture and political life such as migration, language standardization and access to education. Multi-author contributions to these discussions illustrate how variation in both structure and

[13] http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/virtuallibrary/about.html

choice of orthography did not seem to constitute an obstacle to communication. Nor was there any overt pressure on participants to adhere to any particular norm. Instead, the corpus shows pluralism of Romani dialect features in a range of spelling conventions.

Romani language websites tend towards greater consistency in form by comparison to other online media, since they are usually run by small groups of authors, though here, too, dialect variants and diversity of spelling conventions can sometimes be found, as in the case on the Radio Romano page operated by the Swedish broadcasting system with weekly updates in Romani. In November 2013, Romani ranked 238th on Wikipedia among the official list of 287 languages used on the site, with just 541 articles. The Romani section site had 7,451 registered users who contributed to editing the page, but of those, only seven were 'active' (users who contributed to editing the section within the last 30 days), while the 'depth' score (representing the frequency with which articles are updated) was relatively high at 238. (By comparison, English had at the same time a Wikipedia depth score of 809 with over 127,156 active users, while German had a depth score of 90 with 20,298 active users and Dutch had a depth score of 10 with 4,070 active users.) Clearly, Romani presence on Wikipedia represented an intensive effort by a very small circle of individuals.

By contrast, the rise of online instant relay chat forums from around 2005 onwards prompted the use of Romani language by individuals for whom writing in Romani was a way of communicating as well as asserting a common identity. A number of forums explicitly targeted Romani users, often those of similar background who shared a Romani dialect as well as the same contact languages. 'Sinti Chat', for instance, featured contributions in the Sinti Romani dialect (spoken in Germany), which is largely absent from the political landscape of Romani language text production, usually in German-based orthography, as well as in German, with frequent code-switching (Matras 2015: 302). Leggio's (2015) discussion of the DJ website 'Radio Mahalla', which targets first- and second-generation Roma migrants whose background is in the Romani community of Mitrovica in Kosovo, shows how users residing in various Western European countries (Germany, France, Italy) employ a mixture of languages and various orthography styles in Romani while rallying behind the symbolism of a shared diasporic identity.

Leggio and Matras (2017) examine comments in Romani posted on YouTube accompanying videos, trace them to various user networks based on the relationships between user identities, such as mutual channel subscription and reciprocal comments, and explore correlations with choices of dialectal and orthographic variants. Many of the videos document family events such as weddings, and these tend to show a more coherent use of language, as they attract contributions from family members, who are often dispersed across different countries (as can be discerned from the content

of the videos and messages). Music videos tend to target audiences of speakers of particular dialects, who, as a result of migration, also tend to form a transnational virtual community. Videos with religious messages, on the other hand, attract more diverse audiences, and comments are posted in a variety of dialects, drawing on a variety of orthographic conventions. The overarching pattern is that of a polycentric standardization process, one in which users draw on their spoken variety of Romani for dialect forms and on the contact language in which they acquired literacy for orthographic representation, with only scattered and relatively rare indications of cross-user convergence, while on the other hand individual user networks reinforce different variant clusters. In practice, then, there are several more or less consistent conventions of using informal written Romani, each limited to a particular user network, but there are also user networks that show variation of form.

Informal observations indicate that these trends also prevail on other social media such as Facebook, where transnational networks of family relations and friends share dialect variants as well as contact languages. The impact of mobility since the expansions of the European Union post-2004 and 2007, respectively, is gradually becoming discernible, as a young generation of users of similar dialect background now acquire literacy in new contact languages. While it is too early to make generalizations, a trend can be seen associating Romani writing with the orthography of the state language of the country of origin even when knowledge of that language begins to recede. Thus, young Polish Roma who are growing up in England post Facebook comments in Romani in an orthography that is based on Polish despite having limited literacy skills in Polish. Diverse keyboard layouts also limit the choice of options and discourage the use of diacritics, thus prompting a system where various characters are open to contextual interpretation. Such context dependency appears to be fully accepted, especially in one-to-one phone messaging, where interlocutors can rely on their ability to anticipate each other's choices. A key feature of electronic communication in Romani, as observed by Leggio (2015) and by Matras (2015: 302), is the free license to insert elements from contact languages. This illustrates how bottom-up 'standardization' in a multilingual context cannot be regarded as an attempt to 'purify' language by eliminating perceived foreign influences. On the contrary, if 'standardization' is to be defined as a significant change of practice, promoting domain expansion and written use of a hitherto vernacular language variety, then those who have been promoting a 'pure', 'uniform' or 'official' use of Romani remain in the minority, their choices of language use being confined to their various institutional or mobilization contexts, while the majority of users embrace not just pluralism of form in Romani itself, but also multilingual practices or 'translanguaging' (cf. García & Wei 2014).

24.8 Conclusion

Since the early 1990s, Romani-language activists have been able to draw on the early experience of codification in the language and on the use of Romani in the context of cultural and political associations and expand on it. Romani has become a vehicle of political and religious mobilization that is used regularly by international networks of activists in the semi-public domain of political conferences and religious gatherings, as well as in audio-visual messages and in written form, mainly in electronic communication.

Private individuals now also use written Romani as a matter of course in informal electronic communication through text messages and social media. This practice constitutes an expansion of traditional domains of language use only inasmuch as it puts the private domain of informal communication among familiar interlocutors, where Romani has always been the default choice, on public display through the portals of social media. This is enabled through the licensing of an improvised use of style and spelling conventions, which is inherent to social media. Thus, it is in fact the deregulation aspect of social media that has helped writing in Romani to become a routine practice. There is little doubt that the growing importance of transnational networking in the wake of the expansion of the European Union and the mobility of Romani-speaking families who wish to keep in touch have been major factors in the growth of engagement with online platforms of various kinds (see Leggio 2015; Leggio & Matras 2017).

Despite the proliferation of Romani writing and the public use of Romani in the context of mobilization, the developments outlined above have so far not led to either centralized status or corpus regulation, nor have they brought about a general consideration of Romani in the education sector or public services, even in regions with Romani-speaking populations of a significant size (cf. New et al. 2017). However, translating texts into Romani has now become routine on websites that are dedicated to Romani culture, such as the recent Roma Digital Archive project funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation[14] and on Council of Europe pages dedicated to Roma policy; for the most part, there is no centrally guided policy on the choice of dialect or orthographic variants, and these are left to the discretion of the translators.

In some places, provisions for interpreting and translation into Romani are being introduced into the public sector where there is a general policy to ensure accessibility through language provisions, where there is awareness of a Romani-speaking population that requires such provisions and where there is a supply of interpreters; such is the case in Central Manchester Hospitals, where Romani has been included in the list of available languages since 2015, despite the fact that Romani-speaking adult migrants from Eastern Europe are invariably also able to converse in the

[14] https://blog.romarchive.eu

state language of their country of origin (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2016). Growing awareness of Romani has also prompted teachers to give some consideration to the language as a way of building confidence and liaising with families of new arrivals of Romani background (cf. Matras et al. 2015; Payne 2017); an experimental Romani school in Stockholm (Rodell Olgaç 2013) even adopted Romani as a medium of instruction alongside Swedish, until it was shut down in 2016.

Pluralism of form certainly propels the use of Romani, as it frees agents from the constraints of adhering to particular norms and allows spontaneous text production. But it also hinders wider audiences from engaging with longer portions of text because of the effort required in order to overcome the diversity of dialectal and orthographic variants and the potential barriers created by lexical insertions from diverse contact languages, as well as by idiosyncratic neologisms. Despite the proliferation of Romani writing, there are thus still considerable obstacles that prevent the emergence of regular audiences of readers. For that reason, Romani is still very far from establishing a firm presence as a vehicle of written communication. Romani writing essentially serves two functions: in the context of translations of public documents and websites, the production of educational materials and rare but existing original literary productions (such as poems and short stories), it serves primarily an emblematic role as proof of concept and as a public gesture of recognition and empowerment. In the context of personal messages posted on online platforms as well as personal emails and text messages, it serves as a way of extending the private domain of communication across distance by making use of the opportunities offered by new technologies (including the relaxation of normative regulation), as well as reinforcing the cultural, familiar or spiritual bonds among groups of users.

The Romani experience, in its inherently transnational setting and the absence of any claimed link between ethnicity and territoriality, prompts us to reflect on a new definition of language standardization: rather than entail some form of regulation, it is primarily about valorization of ethnic and cultural identity. At the interpersonal level, the extension of private, informal communication to the medium of writing and the public display that is associated with certain online media is an expression of individuals' confidence in key aspects of their cultural identity and a way of using language for the purpose of bonding. In the political and missionary contexts, use of the language in public assemblies and conferences and audiovisual messages serve to mobilize audiences, while the design of writing systems and the creation and promotion of neologisms mean that agents must engage in an actively reflective form of language planning. For political and cultural activists, who are the key lobbyists behind policy statements by multinational organizations and the key agents of language engineering and text production projects, preoccupation with language serves as a way of gaining public recognition for Romani ethnic identity, of legitimizing

the notion of Romani nationhood (albeit without territorial claims) and of challenging the popular perception of Romani identity as a lifestyle rather than an ethnicity.

For those agents who are engaged in conscious and deliberate activities that seek to influence and alter the language behaviour of others, the process assumes a transnational character at a number of levels (cf. Matras 2015). First, it is led by networks of activists and professionals from different countries who collaborate and support one another in the initiation and dissemination of concepts and materials. Next, multinational organizations play a key role in setting standards for public recognition and providing expertise and funding for new initiatives. And finally, state agencies who are involved in the process tend to seek inspiration from one another as well as from international networks of activists and multinational institutions.

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