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Yaron Matras[a], Gerry Howley[b] and Charlotte Jones[a]

[a]School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; [b]School of English, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

Drawing on participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, we discuss teachers' narratives about the language and identity of Roma pupils and compare them with those of the pupils themselves. We explore the sources of information that shape teachers' dispositions, category conflation (of Roma with 'Gypsies/Travellers') and lack of information on sociolinguistic repertoires. We discuss the risks of targeted, scripted institutional narratives on Roma and show that in the case under consideration they are likely to have contributed to a disparity between teachers' perception of Roma, and the views that Roma pupils present drawing on their own experiences.

Introduction

Contemporary use of the term 'Roma' is often surrounded by ambiguity: The Romani language is spoken by geographically dispersed minorities primarily in central and eastern Europe in distinct but related dialectal varieties (Matras 2002). The term 'Roma' is used, alongside other group-specific designations such as 'Sinte' or 'Kaale', as a self-appellation by populations that speak Romani, and this is the meaning that we adopt in this paper. However, in the political discourse of the past two decades, especially in the context of European institutions, 'Roma' has also been used as a cover-term for different populations that do not necessarily share historical origins, culture, or language but are considered to have been subjected in similar ways to prejudice and marginalisation – especially communities that have traditionally maintained family-based itinerant economies such as the Travellers of Ireland or the Gens du Voyage of France. Paradoxically, 'Roma' as a political term of reference has thus come to serve as a mere placeholder for the traditional, undifferentiated popular notion of 'Gypsies' (cf. Matras 2015). We will show that this conflation of concepts, along with absence of information and misguided assumptions about Roma's linguistic repertoires, affect perceptions of Roma migrant pupils in the education system.

Approaches to Roma education have tended to address issues of disadvantaged access as well as discrimination and segregation (Brüggemann and Hornberg 2013; O'Nions 2015). Some have considered the education system itself as an instrument that is used to contain and control Roma (Trubeta 2013; Teasley 2013) or which seeks to intervene with or alter Romani traditions (Brüggemann 2014; Engebrigtsen 2015). While some scholars argue for the merits of school models that are designed specifically to accommodate Roma culture and values (cf. Krause 1989; Olgaç 2013, 207–209), others such as Igarashi (2005) and Setti (2015) address the risk that targeted support might contribute to the perpetuation of stigmas.[1]

The role of language in the educational inclusion of Roma has received relatively little attention. Kyuchukov (2000) takes a 'linguistic rights' approach (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1995) and calls for the introduction of mother tongue education in Romani as a way of validating Romani culture and identity. New, Kyuchukov and de Villiers (2017) follow in a similar direction, asserting that Roma children are disadvantaged in schools due to their socialisation in Romani (a low status home language) and exposure to a non-standard variety of the majority language, both of which are often perceived as 'deficiencies'. Based on observations in Slovakia, Gažovičová (2015) similarly argues that language policies in the education system fail to support functional bilingualism and that the absence of instruction in Romani or of efforts to highlight its value constructs barriers and risks leading to 'semi-lingualism'.

Roma are among the migrants who have been moving from eastern European countries to the West since the opening of borders and subsequent EU-enlargement and their mobility has attracted considerable attention in media and public discourse. In the UK, a number of policy reports were commissioned in recent years to address the educational inclusion of eastern European Roma migrants. A government report (Ofsted 2014, 7) opens with a reference to an overarching category 'Gypsies/Roma', stating that they generally show poor outcomes and low attendance rates, and goes on to argue that the increase in the number of Roma migrant pupils therefore poses particular challenges to schools and local authorities. Penfold (2015, 2) goes even further and describes the attainment of Roma as 'the biggest challenge currently facing UK educators', while Lever (2012, 9) claims that 'it can be very difficult to convince Roma parents of the merits and value of education'. By contrast, Fremlova and Ureche (2011) report that Roma migrants from the Czech Republic and Slovakia value school in the UK and flag the absence of discrimination and segregation, which they suffered in the education systems of their countries of origin.

These reports suggest that adjustment difficulties, which any group of new arrivals is likely to face in the education system, can be amplified through legacies of deprivation in the origin countries, but also through reduced aspirations on the part of the education system itself triggered through pre-determined views on Roma culture and a conflation of the categories 'Gypsies' and 'Roma'.

Among the very few academic studies that have taken an interest in the education of eastern European Roma migrants are those by Hemelsoet (2015) on the integration of Roma migrants of various backgrounds in Ghent, Belgium, and Payne (2017) on Slovak Roma in Sheffield, England. Hemelsoet (2015) takes an 'applied-dialogical' approach to actors' narratives, showing how local policy-makers, schools, and Roma parents each have distinct definitions of 'problems': Policy is broadly concerned with metrics and deviations from standard patterns, schools are concerned with reconciling government targets with parental expectations, while the parents' perspective is experience-based. An effective educational policy, he argues, must take various stakeholders' problem constructions into account. Hemelsoet draws attention to the risk of framing problems in terms of 'Roma culture' rather than in relation to home experiences that are conditioned and shaped by a variety of different circumstances.

Payne (2017) views the school as a site of micro-level language planning, where language provisions can serve as a bridge to inclusion. He takes an exploratory ethnographic approach that involves observation and semi-structured interviews to analyse reciprocal behavioural influences of Roma pupils and teachers. He examines obstacles to the school's engagement with Roma pupils that stem from a lack of understanding of these pupils' linguistic repertoires, the absence of easily accessible information about their Romani dialect (and about Romani in general) and barriers that Slovak interpreters encounter due to various levels of Roma pupils' proficiency in Slovak. He relates these to measures taken by the school to employ interpreters and Romani classroom support workers and to enhance EAL provisions, and argues that such measures constitute an evolving, semi-structured 'language-in-education' policy.

Both studies thus attribute considerable importance to the relationship between pre-existing knowledge (dispositions), experience, and 'actorship' in identifying and addressing problems. They equally emphasise the key role of language in Roma pupils' access to the learning environment (and curriculum content) as well as in enabling interaction between the school and parents, and the need for language and communication strategies both within the classroom and beyond to take into consideration a realistic assessment of language skills and language repertoires.

In the following we explore actors' awareness of and attitudes towards Romani language and identity in a setting that comprises a number of schools in an area in Manchester in which Romanian Roma began to settle in 2007–2008. We first show how the arrival of Romanian Roma pupils was framed as a problem. We then examine the impact of a targeted intervention by local authority officials and a voluntary sector agency on teachers' dispositions on Roma, and the effect that it had on problem construction. We show how teachers' narratives on Roma were shaped and framed by a complexity of sources and factors that included general pre-dispositions on 'Gypsies', targeted training on Roma, and scripted information in the form of briefings and reports.

Roma pupils, on the other hand, narrate their own identity on the basis of their own experience, within the classroom and beyond.

The disparity between the dispositions of the two groups of actors – teachers and Roma pupils – reduces their aspirations of one another. Our observations also suggest that the scripting of an institutional narrative about Roma increases the potential for friction, as it casts Roma pupils as inherently prone to learning disadvantages, thus in effect re-enacting some of the segregationist discourses that have been observed in the origin countries.

The setting: Romanian Roma migrants in Manchester

Several hundred Romanian Roma settled in and around the Gorton South district of Manchester soon after Romanian citizens gained freedom of movement within the European Union in 2007. They belonged to a number of extended families, originating mainly from southeastern Romania. Many had lived in Italy, France or Spain before coming to the UK. In the spring of 2009, an opposition Councillor representing the district forwarded a petition to the authorities on behalf of residents, blaming Roma for causing disturbances, living in overcrowded housing, dumping waste in alleys, living off proceeds of crime, and allowing truancy. The matter was quickly politicised and the city council set up the Gorton South Roma Strategy Group (RSG) whose task was to look into the allegations and reduce tensions. The RSG formulated standards for acceptable community behaviour in an effort to show residents that it would enforce expected norms, but it also took steps to counteract negative perception especially around images of criminality and so-called anti-social behaviour. Thus, while the mere establishment of the RSG acknowledged the presence of Roma as a 'public concern', its actual work and communications aimed at supporting inclusion by counteracting divisive discourses. After some eighteen months, its work was discontinued and the city council declared that it was content that Roma had access to all major services and a dedicated policy was no longer required.

The authorities' first point of contact with Roma was through the city council's education department's unit for International New Arrivals, Travellers and Supplementary Schools (INA), also referred to as the Ethnic Minority Achievement unit. Until it was hit by budget cuts in 2011–2012, this unit was responsible for providing registration and integration support (including bilingual classroom assistants) for new arrivals. It also had historical responsibility for Traveller Education, a dedicated service offered by local authorities across the UK to support the population of Gypsies and Travellers living on caravan sites who engage in seasonal mobility.

Two of the local schools in the district, Garden Hill primary school and Pine Hill secondary school,[2] registered a significant increase in the number of Romanian Roma pupils from 2008. At Garden Hill, numbers rose from 41 in

2008/09 to 86 or around 25% of all pupils in 2011/12, and at Pine Hill from 26 in 2008/09 to 104 or around 22% of all pupils in 2011/12. Both schools have a diverse population and a high proportion of pupils whose first or home language is not English (between 50–60% at Garden Hill, between 40–50% at Pine Hill). One of the key problems identified both by Roma parents and by the INA team in the early period (2008/09), and noted in the minutes of the RSG meetings, was an insufficient number of school places in the area, parents' lack of familiarity with the registration procedure, as well as the reluctance of other primary schools to accept Roma pupils. The RSG put measures in place to address all three issues. In January 2010 it noted that 'once Roma children are in school, their attendance and outcomes are improving', and by January 2012 the city council's Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that 'the attendance rates of Roma children are out-stripping those of non-Roma children' and that the city council's school admissions team was 'challenging schools where there is discrimination over the admission of Roma'.

In the summer of 2009, the city council commissioned the University of Manchester's Romani Project (a cluster of research activities specialising in the Romani language) to carry out a survey among Romanian Roma in Gorton South about their aspirations and to make recommendations for a municipal engagement strategy. The project recommended that training should be offered to young people who could build bridges to the authorities and public services and serve as role models to youngsters in the community. That recommendation was taken up by a local charity organisation, the Big Life Group, which employed Romanian Roma as street vendors of its weekly magazine, and which set up a training course for around a dozen Roma. The city council's INA facilitated part-time work opportunities for the course participants as classroom assistants, first at Pine Hill secondary school and later in a number of primary schools. This work was subsequently outsourced to a voluntary sector agency, the Black Health Agency for Equality (BHA), which had some personnel overlap with the INA (see Matras, Leggio, and Steel 2015).

In 2010, the INA began to publish memos and reports on Romanian Roma pupils, and organised various showcase activities with Roma pupils at Pine Hill. In 2012, after the launch of the EU's National Strategies for Roma Inclusion, which opened up priority funding opportunities for Roma engagement projects, INA and BHA received a joint two-year grant from the EU's Lifelong Learning scheme and invited six local schools, including Pine Hill (but not Garden Hill) to join a 'Roma Network of Schools' ('Network'). The project included the provision of part-time Roma classroom assistants, training for teachers, a number of showcase events and the production of a series of reports and reference materials as well as commissioned reports by academics to validate the activity, notably Lever (2012) and Scullion and Brown (2013). In 2013, the INA/BHA partnership was continued through a three-year grant from Manchester City Council (see Matras, Leggio, and Steel 2015), but the project was discontinued after two years.

Data and methods

The authors are sociolinguists, with respective specialisations in Romani linguistics and in the acquisition of English dialect features by immigrants. We draw on a variety of datasets and participant observations from the period between 2008 and 2016. In 2008, two of the authors were invited by Garden Hill school to advise teachers on Romani language and culture, and established thereafter a working relationship with the school, as part of which one of the authors took on a position as a teacher and later leader for Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) provisions at the school. With permission from the school, we were able to draw on notes from observations, follow up interviews with other staff and parents, and access to school documents for the relevant period. In 2009, one of the authors led a survey of the Romanian Roma community in Gorton South, commissioned by Manchester City Council.

In 2013, two of the authors launched the MigRom project,[3] in partnership with Manchester City Council. The project collected life history interviews among Romanian Roma in Manchester (in the Romani language) and produced an ethnography of Roma migrant inclusion and city council policy through a 'process pragmatism' approach to participatory research (for a discussion see Leggio 2017; Cools et al. 2017) as well as through document analysis. From 2013–2016 MigRom ran a weekly drop-in advice service for Roma migrants, led by three outreach workers, two of them Roma, which kept annotated records of issues raised by clients, including school issues. Two of the outreach workers had served as Roma classroom assistants from 2011–2013, working in various Network schools, and the third worked as EAL teacher at two of the Network schools during the same period, and the authors are able to draw on their reports and experiences. In 2014, the MigRom team carried out classroom observations at Garden Hill and Pine Hill schools, shadowing 23 Roma pupils and 9 teachers (for a detailed discussion see Matras et al. 2015), and received access to documents relating to school policy on Roma. In 2014 and 2015 the team carried out one-to-one semi-structured interviews with teachers who had taken part in the INA/BHA Network during 2012–2013, and with young Romanian Roma aged 17–20 who had been enrolled at Pine Hill until 2014.

Two of the authors initiated a survey of pupils' home languages, piloted at four Manchester schools, which involved interviewing pupils about their language use and proficiency, and which included Roma interviewees (see Matras, Robertson, and Jones 2016). Finally, one of the authors carried out an ethnography and recording of speech data in English among Romanian Roma pupils at Pine Hill from 2011–2013, with the aim of assessing the impact of life experiences, friendship networks, future aspirations and identity narratives on the acquisition of Manchester dialect features, and we draw on the content of these interviews and observations among teachers at Pine Hill that accompanied them.

Ethical approval for the research was provided by the research ethics committees of the universities of Manchester and Salford, respectively. For the recordings of pupils at Pine Hill school, parental consent was obtained by the researcher via a Romanian interpreter, and permission was granted by the school. Altogether 27 interviews were carried out with pupils at Pine Hill, and 24 interviews were carried out with school leavers (who were old enough to give consent). Conversations with numerous teachers took place throughout the observation period and informed these observations. Eight teachers were interviewed specifically about their work with Roma pupils in a semi-structured way. As noted above, one of the authors worked as a teacher at one of the schools, but did not actively engage in the research until after her work at the school had come to an end.

Institutional discourses

The present section aims to assess the views and narratives about Romanian Roma migrants that are represented and constructed by documents to which teachers and managers in the two schools have had access, and which contributed to shaping their attitudes to Roma pupils. These narratives constitute on the one hand part of the setting of our investigation, while on the other they also represented the product of that setting, and form part of the data that reflect attitudes. For this reason, we include our discussion of institutional discourses here, in the transition between our discussion of the setting and methods and that of the recorded narratives of teachers and pupils. For the analysis of institutional discourses we draw on a number of reports that are in the public domain and which were produced by a team of authors bringing together officers of the city council's International New Arrivals, Travellers and Supplementary Schools (INA) team, the Black Health Agency for Equality (BHA), and their academic advisors (see also Matras, Leggio, and Steel 2015). Some of these were used to inform training sessions delivered by this team to teachers, and some (such as Murphy 2013; Davies and Murphy 2010) were distributed directly to staff at the schools as manuals. We also received access by the schools to a series of school internal documents. These included anonymised registration statistics of pupils by ethnicity and first language, anonymised referral forms used by teachers to comment on the behaviour of Roma pupils, English as Additional Language (EAL) strategy documents and reports which mentioned Roma, inspection reports, strategy documents prepared by the INA and BHA teams to support Roma in schools and powerpoint slides about Roma used in training sessions for teachers delivered by INA and BHA, and school reports on EAL support and interventions for Roma pupils at Pine Hill school. We take a descriptive theme-oriented approach to the texts, searching for recurring themes that relate to our research questions as outlined above.

The declared aim of INA's intervention in 2010 was to ensure that Roma attended school, by supporting parents in the registration process and encouraging schools to welcome and engage with Roma pupils. An INA document on 'Planning to integrate and support newly arrived Roma pupils' delivered to Pine Hill in early 2010 stated as one of its aims to 'challenge racism and promote racial equality' and to ensure that 'Roma pupils are listened to and able to contribute', while its publication 'What's working: conversations with Manchester's Romanian Roma community living in Longsight and Levenshulme' (Davies and Murphy 2010, 38, 7) reported that young Roma 'had experienced prejudice, racism and conflict in Manchester' and acknowledged that 'most young people are excited, proud and motivated by school'. The city council's Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to monitor progress and in January 2012 it reported that Garden Hill primary school was 'the first local school to break down these barriers, and now many more of the local primary schools take Roma children'. The Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee noted in December 2013 that one of its members who was a governor at Pine Hill High secondary school commented that 'members of the Roma community did have the potential for high levels of achievement', and in June 2014, it noted that 'a member commented that, based on his experience, many Roma children had good attendance and attainment at primary school.' Thus, the city acknowledged that Roma were enthusiastic about school, and that it was schools' responsibility to break down barriers.

At the same time, however, a narrative emerged that attributed low aspirations to the Roma. Various reports to city council committees in the period between 2008–2013 noted low attendance and achievement rates in the population group 'Gypsy/Roma/Travellers', which was captured in school statistics as a single category. In March 2010, the RSG noted, based on a report from INA, that 'there is a safeguarding issue around teenage girls not attending school', while a city council report on Population Change and Cohesion from January 2012 claimed that 'many Roma residents traditionally do not engage in the formal education system'. BHA reported to the city council's Communities Scrutiny Committee in November 2013 that the rate of teenage pregnancies among the Roma was 'disproportionate' and that this was 'influenced by cultural expectations'. It proposed to establish a 'Romani Wellbeing Strategic Group' and to develop 'protocols' in order to 'track "hard to reach" girls' and to 'share information regarding "at risk" young people in relation to criminal activity and school drop-out'. The same statement was replicated again in the city council's annual flagship publication, the 'State of the City Report: Communities of Interest', in May 2014.

The INA/BHA Network project produced a series of training and reference materials intended to inform schools on Roma culture and distinct behaviour patterns. The 'Network Learning Book' (Murphy 2013) claimed that most Romanian Roma pupils arriving in Manchester schools had no prior school

experience. It also asserted that Roma families possess, through their oral culture, 'the ability to negotiate the world without need for reading and writing' (p. 34) and that Roma children may therefore 'be better at memorising than other children' (p. 80). The publication advises teachers that 'Roma rarely sit still for a long time' (p. 39), that 'most Roma are highly skilled at talking and listening at the same time' and that 'teachers need to be aware that if a Romani child is not talking, it is likely they are not listening!' (p. 81). The project also drafted a special 'Admissions and Induction Protocol for Roma Children'[4] which proposed that schools should record, among other information, Roma pupils' readiness for learning, and whether the pupil 'smiles and greets adults in school', 'has the strength of fine motor control', 'knows that words convey meaning', and is able to 'sit appropriately for lesson duration'.

The message conveyed by the Network was that Roma, due to their culture, have particular needs and inherent disadvantages in the school environment, which must be addressed through targeted strategies. While the project's engagement with primary schools in 2011–2012 was usually limited to a number of showcase events and training sessions in addition to the provision of classroom support, its impact was particularly strong in Pine Hill secondary school, which continued to contract BHA to deliver targeted support for Roma until 2014. Already in 2010, the school introduced a segregated 'Pathway' for Roma, which was flagged as an EAL provision but was criticised by auditors in early 2011 as a 'withdrawal mechanism for Roma' (cf. Matras, Leggio, and Steel 2015, 14). At least until May 2014, the school also used a designated 'Roma Referral Form' to compile notes on the behaviour of individual Roma pupils.

In June 2013, the school produced a report that was submitted to the Department for Education and circulated among senior school staff, on the adverse effect of the presence of Roma pupils. It opens by saying that 'It is long established that Gypsy, Roma pupils and pupils of Irish Traveller heritage (GRT) are amongst the lowest-achieving groups at every Key Stage of education', thus relying on the conflated category, while on the other hand it attributed learning difficulties to the use of the Romani language, stating that "Roma' itself is not a written language and therefore the Roma pupils and their parents (whom one generally relies upon to support the learning of their children) have no written tradition even within their own language'. Drawing on input from INA, the report asserts that 'Roma students can be very promiscuous and are very accepting of inappropriate sexualised behaviour from male students', that Roma girls are caught 'begging in Manchester City Centre', and that weddings of Roma girls 'from the age of eleven' take place at a local park. It goes on to flag that Roma make up 10% of all exclusions (failing to mention in that connection that at the time Roma made up 22% of the school population) and lists 'violent and aggressive behaviour towards students and staff' among the reasons. The report calculates the additional cost incurred to the school for dedicated support for Roma (most of it outsourced to BHA, the city council INA's partner on

the Roma Network project) at £155k between 2010–2013, while another school memo on dated November 2013 put the figure at £230k. The report concludes by saying that 'School resources have inevitably been diverted from other pupils' and that 'the high numbers of Roma pupils on the roll and the complexity of their needs has impacted detrimentally and unfairly on the performance tables for the school.'

Teachers' narratives

In our conversations with staff at Pine Hill, many echoed similar attitudes to those expressed in the school's report from June 2013. During observations in 2011, teachers told us that Roma girls got married at the age of fourteen and then 'disappeared', and that pupils would 'dress in Romanian clothes' to go begging and pickpocketing in town. At one of our first visits, in October 2010, the Assistant Head asked whether the University would be in a position to support the school's request to the Department for Education to exclude Roma from its achievement statistics as they reflected badly on the school. In a magazine interview she claimed that many Roma pupils had not been to school before and lacked a sense of routine.[5]

The assumption that Roma pupils had no prior school experience also appeared in BHA's commissioned project reports (Lever 2012, 9) and was often repeated to us by primary school teachers who were part of the Network. It reflects a belief that Roma don't value education, as well as being used to explain the school's deteriorating attainment and attendance figures. Our own observations and interviews show that in fact only a very small proportion of Manchester's Romanian Roma children, perhaps around 10%, arrived in the city without prior educational experience – mainly those whose families had suffered repeated evictions from makeshift settlements in France and Italy.

Many teachers had difficulties conceptualising Romani identity and language. We found that staff at Pine Hill used the term 'Eastern European' as synonymous with 'Roma'. Roma classroom assistants reported having been asked to translate for Eastern European pupils who were not Roma, while on the other hand teachers selected a (non-Roma) Romanian pupil to participate at a University widening participation day that was intended specifically for Roma pupils. The fact that the majority of Roma pupils were Romanian nationals, the similarity between the terms 'Romani' and 'Romanian', and the fact that many Roma pupils, not knowing how to refer to their language in English, used 'Romanian' to refer to both Romani and Romanian, usually led teachers to assume that the two were one and the same. One primary school teacher described how she only realised that Romanian Roma pupils may not be speaking Romanian when a Romanian teacher explained that she could not understand what a child was saying. Even after this conversation, the teacher assumed the pupils spoke a non-standard variety of the Romanian language. The teacher

still referred to these pupils as 'Roma', not 'Romanians', as was customary in the school, suggesting that awareness of ethnicity did not equate to an awareness of the language. A teacher at another Network school told us in an interview that she was 'fairly sure we don't have any staff who speak Romanian or any of the Roma languages', showing how the two languages were equated, but also the absence of awareness of a particular Romani language. Nor was there awareness among teachers that the youngest Roma pupils, who grew up in the UK, had only a very basic oral command of Romanian, and no exposure to literacy in that language. One teacher described how she presented a book in Romanian to a year 3 pupil and was disappointed to learn that the girl was unable to read it. This was often interpreted as evidence of a lack of motivation or academic aptitude. We also witnessed occasions when Czech Roma pupils were selected to take part in sessions where they were asked to read from a picture book in Romanian.

Staff who had taken part in training on Roma culture did show awareness that Roma had their own language, which was not written down, and that they may, in addition, also speak the majority or state language of their country of origin, depending on their age of arrival in the UK. However, a teacher testimony cited by Murphy (2013, 78) from the Network activities shows that over-simplified generalisations risk creating an essentialist image of language:

> 'Learning 'he' and 'she' – I realised that the children were struggling with this more than I had expected for children who can speak a Latin language like Romanian. I realised that it was because their home language is Romani which is Sanskrit based so has not differentiation of he and she'

In fact, Sanskrit has no personal pronouns in the third person at all, though the demonstratives 'this' and 'that' are inflected for gender. Romani, by contrast, does have gender-inflected personal pronouns. The teacher's attempt to connect natural difficulties to what she had heard about the ancient origins of Roma and their language resulted in a deterministic approach to their learning. In a series of training slides used by the INA/BHA Network at Pine Hill, teachers were advised:

> 'Roma children have Indian origins, so may be able to communicate with Asian children who s [sic] languages are also rooted in Sanskrit such as Gujarati/Hindi/Urdu/Bangla and Punjabi. Use basic Romani words to affirm respect and understanding.'

The statement testifies to a lack of understanding of both the structural and sociolinguistic reality of Romani. In fact, apart from some basic vocabulary items articulated in isolation (i.e. not embedded into sentences), Romani is not in any way mutually intelligible with South Asian languages. Due to its role as an in-group and family language, speakers of Romani do not expect outsiders to mimic phrases in their language and will not necessarily view such mimicry as a token of respect.

Narratives of Roma youth

Roma pupils' self-presentation of their language and ethnic identity clearly suffered from a lack of exposure to informed discourse about Romani in English. As a consequence, pupils either improvised terms and explanations, or copied those that were used by teachers, thus at times reinforcing teachers' misconceptions. Many pupils referred to their language as 'Roma' or 'Roma Gypsy', but there was regular confusion between the terms 'Roma' and 'Romanian' and a number of students used the two interchangeably. This does not reflect abandonment of Romani in the home domain, and in fact the School Language Survey (Matras, Robertson, and Jones 2016) and our general observations in homes confirm the high rate of maintenance of Romani as a family language, which Roma pupils, unlike other non-English speakers of their generation, tend to use not just with parents but also with siblings.

It is also clear that despite the terminological confusion, Roma pupils regard their home language as the principal visible trait that identifies them to others in the mixed environment as Roma, rather than any cultural practices or abstract value systems that are confined to the home and are not readily identifiable. In classrooms, especially in the secondary school environment at Pine Hill, we often observed the 'congregation effect' of Roma pupils choosing to sit together and then visibly setting themselves apart from the other pupils as well as form teachers by using Romani among themselves. When asked, pupils said: 'it's really hard not to talk your own language'. They also reported that teachers 'get angry when they see you talking in your language, because in class you have to speak English'. This targeting of language as a visible, distinctive feature often left an impression among Roma pupils of general unfair treatment. Pupils told us they did not feel equal to others because teachers would shout at them if they talked to one another during the lesson, whereas when English pupils did the same the teachers turned a blind eye. We also heard reports about pupils suffering abuse from English pupils 'when we were talking to my sister in our language'. Parents told us that their children felt embarrassed using their language at school, though they did not feel embarrassed about being Roma.

The mapping of identity onto language from the pupils' perspective is illustrated by the unusual case of Esma, a Roma girl who admitted to having both languages, Romanian and Romani, in the home, but who claimed that Romani was used in the home not because the family were Roma but because her mother 'liked the language' and decided to use it. Esma's claim was contradicted by her brother's statement, and later on we got to know other family members and were able to ascertain that Romani was indeed the family language of all generations and of all family relations. Esma's unusual personal narrative and her projection of an underlying non-Roma identity correlated with the diversity of her friendship groups, and the fact that she had acquired the most Manchester accent features of all her Roma peers who were recorded.

Esma also developed a very close relationship of trust to one of the female teachers at Pine Hill. But just before the Easter break of 2015, that teacher reported the then fifteen year-old Esma to Social Services, claiming that she had information that her parents intended to take her to Romania to marry her. Esma and her two sisters were taken into emergency foster care, where they remained for three weeks until the claims were found to be baseless and the girls were returned to their family. The incident was without a doubt traumatic for the family, but also for the entire tight-knit community. In the context of our discussion it serves as an illustration of how, from the perspective of Roma pupils, identity is mapped onto and displayed by language, a visible factor that can be controlled, to some extent, or subjected to makeshift narratives that represent a child's aspirations and imagination. From the teacher's perspective, by contrast, Roma identity amounts to a set of invisible practices that are regarded as conflicting not just with majority society's cultural values but also with the law, and suspicion is so entrenched that it can override natural solidarity and even due process of evidence collection.

A curious terminological manifestation of Roma pupils' self-perception was their use of the label 'Gypsoy' as a wholesale reference to those who are not Roma – a kind of symbolic reversal of what was regarded as a demarcation imposed by outsiders. The term had been used by Roma pupils at Pine Hill to refer to non-Roma, usually white British, who were seen as aggressive towards Roma. We know that there was a genuine fear of the 'Gypsoy' among the pupils. The term appeared at a time when Roma families were having their windows broken by white English youth from the neighbourhood. In 2009–2010, neighbourhood issues had spilled over into school life to the point that Roma pupils at Pine Hill had to have certain arrangements for their protection so as not to be attacked by other pupils on their way home at the end of the school day. Many pupils told us that they had been subjected to abusive comments by fellow students who called them 'Gypsy' and suggested they should 'go back to Romania'. They also generally reported that they found it difficult to make friends with English pupils, and that most relations were with peers of eastern European or Asian backgrounds. The relationship with Czech Roma was often flagged as close due to the fact that they 'spoke the same language as us', although our observations suggested that Romanian and Czech Roma pupils actually preferred to use English to communicate rather than tackle the obstacles of dialect differences within Romani; here, common language acted as a solidarity cue rather than a vehicle of communication, reaffirming the observation that language served as a powerful, visible identity marker.

Conclusion

Our observations show a disparity between the dispositions of teachers and the narratives of Roma pupils regarding Roma identity and language. Teachers'

narratives are shaped to a considerable extent by contradictory institutional discourses, which on the one hand acknowledge Roma as perpetual victims of discrimination who have disadvantaged access to schools, while on the other hand they attribute to them particular cultural pre-dispositions that are said to affect their learning aptitude. These include contradictory and often inaccurate information about Roma pupils' language repertoires, but they also relate to 'invisible' practices that are rarely if ever observed directly by teachers in their interactions with Roma, yet they define teachers' aspirations of them. By contrast, Roma pupils' own narratives of their identity revolve primarily around their experiences of being singled out by others, or in turn bonding with one another, around the visibility of their own language.

Discussions of Roma inclusion in schools have so far considered language as a human right (Kyuchukov 2000; New, Kyuchukov, and de Villiers 2017), as a vehicle of communication with parents (Hemelsoet 2015), or as a means of classroom support (Payne 2017). Our study shows how important it is to promote awareness among teachers of the sociolinguistic repertoires of Roma pupils. First, recognising the community of Romani speakers can help set aside both pre-conceptions and experiences associated specifically with Travellers. A realistic understanding of Romani and the role it plays in pupils' lives can help remove essentialist expectations and reduced aspirations, and prevent stigmatisation and exclusion. A perspective on Roma pupils as, primarily, a group that defines itself around its language rather than around assumed hidden or invisible practices can help alleviate unnecessary suspicion and remove barriers to inclusion.

Notes

1. Numerous studies address attainment and integration issues of the population known as 'Gypsies and Travellers' in the UK. Since our focus is on the population that speak the Romani language, and the particular issues of language barriers and awareness of language and identity, we do not refer to studies on non-Romani populations (but see below for the tendency to associate Roma with 'Gypsies/Travellers'.
2. The names have been altered.
3. http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/.
4. Lifelong Learning Programme Key Activity 1 Compendium 2011, p. 4–5: http://eacea.ec. europa.eu/llp/results_projects/documents/roma_compendium_en.pdf. Last accessed 06/08/2017.
5. Ciara Leeming, 'The new Mancunians', TES Magazine from 01.04.2011.

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Notes on contributors

Yaron Matras is Professor of Linguistics at the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester. His areas of research specialisation are contact linguistics, minority languages, languages of the Middle East, and language documentation. He has published widely on Romani language and culture and was Editor of the journal Romani Studies from 1999–2017.

Gerry Howley is research examines the acquisition of Manchester English dialect features by adolescent Roma migrants. She is currently a Teaching Associate in Sociolinguistics at the University of Sheffield.

Charlotte Jones has worked on numerous research projects on the Romani language at the University of Manchester. She also taught at a school with many Roma migrants and led on issues of language. She has an MA in language education.

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