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THE VULNERABILITY OF BANAT BULGARIAN IN SERBIA. AN OVERVIEW

Abstract: This chapter investigates the vulnerability of Banat Bulgarian in Serbia through a questionnaire completed by members of the Banat Bulgarian community in the villages of Ivanovo, Skorenovac, Belo Blato and Konak. The results indicate that 43.4% of the participants' children speak Banat Bulgarian fluently, a significant decline from the percentage of the respondents' parents, who used the variety exclusively or mostly, and the respondents who use Banat Bulgarian along with Serbian and another language. Banat Bulgarian is mainly used within the family and less frequently with friends, almost never with neighbours, colleagues, clergy, and officials. Serbian dominates in private and social discussions. The dominance of Serbian is also reflected in the respondents' self-assessment of their language skills: Serbian received ratings of good, very good, and excellent, whereas Banat Bulgarian was often rated as poor or non-existent. Despite this, the majority of respondents considered Banat Bulgarian important and said it symbolises their community and culture. Banat Bulgarian is absent from the school system and official institutions in Serbia; it is only present in the linguistic landscape of the village of Ivanovo on official signs and minimally represented in cultural life, radio and TV broadcasts, websites, and social media. Nevertheless, only a few respondents consume such content in their language. Research shows that Banat Bulgarian is endangered in all examined domains. The dominance of Serbian, particularly apparent in language proficiency assessment and poor transmission of Banat Bulgarian

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to younger generations, and the almost complete absence of Banat Bulgarian in institutional and cultural fields suggest that the latter is a language used exclusively at home.

Keywords: Banat Bulgarian, vulnerable variety, intergenerational transmission, language use, language skills, attitudes towards language, institutional support

1. Introduction

Banat Bulgarians are Roman Catholic South Slavs that live in the Banat region, encompassing parts of present-day Romania and Serbia. They are also called Paulicians or Pavlikians (e.g. Nomachi 2016). In Serbia, Banat Bulgarians predominantly refer to themselves as *Palćene*, although they also use the Serbian version of their ethnonym, *Palćani*, and recognise the ethnonym Banat Bulgarians, as well. Reflecting the dominant ethnonym in the community, the linguonym for the variety they speak is *palćenśći (jazić)*.[1] Banat Bulgarian has been classified as definitely endangered by the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* in 2010 (Moseley 2010). This assessment, however, "does not differentiate the language situation in Serbia from that in Romania" (Sikimić & Nomachi 2016: 14). Furthermore, "the endangerment of Banat Bulgarian cannot be treated as a whole and […] revitalization strategies must be different within the same language and with regard to the particular geographic varieties" (Nomachi 2020: 312). Recognising the necessity of distinction, Motoki Nomachi (2015) compares the two regions based on historical data and his own observations about the communities, concluding that Banat Bulgarian is more endangered in Serbia than in Romania. Banat Bulgarians are not a recognised minority in Serbia, nor is the variety they speak an official minority language. This chapter aims

[1] The data is based on information retrieved during fieldwork in the Banat Bulgarian community of Vojvodina. Apart from open-ended interviews, a questionnaire was used (for details, see Section 3) containing questions about the ethnonyms and linguonyms the community uses. In this chapter, we used the term *Banat Bulgarian* only because it is more frequently found in the literature. In Serbian literature, the most commonly used term for this community is *Palćani*, although the term *Banat Bulgarians* is also frequently employed. For instance, both terms are mentioned by Vukov Rafai and Rafai (2021). The term *Palćeni* is rarely used. One example is its appearance in the title of the publication *Palćene in Banat* (Nikolin 2008), but it is not consistently used throughout the texts in the publications.

to assess the current level of Banat Bulgarian vulnerability in Serbia through a quantitative analysis of responses obtained directly from community members via the *VLingS Questionnaire* (for details on this questionnaire, see Section 3). Alongside the quantitative data retrieved from the questionnaire, qualitative data obtained through fieldwork is also used to better understand and assess the endangerment of Banat Bulgarian in Serbia. This research focuses on the status of Banat Bulgarian in the community itself and the community's awareness and perception of the level of endangerment of their variety.

2. Previous research of Banat Bulgarian

Although Banat Bulgarians are not a new research topic in linguistics, there is a limited body of literature on them. Consequently, most studies on this topic share several focal points, which will be addressed below.

2.1. Identity and religion

Most papers on the subject note that Banat Bulgarians are descended from Catholic Bulgarians who had lived in Bulgaria and migrated to present-day Serbian and Romanian Banat from the 17th to the 19th century (e.g. Vučković 2010: 247–249, Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11, Belić & Nomachi 2018: 73) and explore how their linguistic identity intersects with broader questions of ethnic and cultural identity. Among these, a key issue is their relation and distinction from other Bulgarian groups, particularly Bulgarians in Bulgaria and/or Bulgarians from Bulgaria in the diaspora, who are predominantly Orthodox Christians. This is often discussed in the context of the difficulty of legally differentiating Banat Bulgarians from other Bulgarians (Belić & Nomachi 2018: 75–77).[2] Nevertheless, they are considered a separate group, often referred to as a *hidden minority*[3] (Nomachi 2020: 289). Religion is a central aspect of Banat Bulgarian culture and identity, significantly shaping their sense of self, community cohesion, and historical

[2] This is especially important because "Bulgarian *per se* has been recognised officially as a minority language in Yugoslavia since 1947 (and later, in independent Serbia)" (Nomachi 2020: 293).

[3] For the term *hidden minority*, see Promitzer et al. 2009; on the hidden minorities in the Balkans, see Sikimić 2004; on the Bulgarians as a hidden minority, see Sikimić 2007.

narrative (for further details, see Vučković 2010). It influences language use, community cohesion, and cultural revival efforts. Even the alternative term for Banat Bulgarians, *Pavlikians* or *Paulicians*, which is more widespread within the group, originates from the period when they were associated with the religious movement known as Paulicianism or Bogomilism (Nomachi 2015: 395–396).[4] Catholicism has also played a significant role in language standardisation and the publication of early works in Banat Bulgarian, with religious leaders heavily involved in initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting the Banat Bulgarian language and culture (Nomachi 2015: 398, Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 12, Belić & Nomachi 2018: 73–74, 75–77, also see Section 2.4). Recent research suggests that "religion is no longer the most crucial element of identity" (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11), especially among younger community members.

2.2. Banat Bulgarian: a language or a dialect?

The question of whether Banat Bulgarian is a language or a dialect has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Nomachi 2015: 396–398). Nevertheless, this debate remains unresolved, as "no linguistic definition clearly separates a language from a dialect" (Nomachi 2015: 396), and the criteria for this distinction "are also dependent on extra-linguistic factors, such as historical, social and political" (ibid.). Given that Banat Bulgarian has its own literary language (see Section 2.5) and also originates from a northern Bulgarian dialect (cf. Stoykov 1967), some regard it as a distinct language and others as a dialect. The majority of Bulgarian linguists, starting from Stoykov (1967, 1968) and the authors of the monograph on the Bulgarian language and its dialects (BAN 1978: 4)[5] to more recent works by Ivanova and Becheva (Ivanova & Becheva 2003, Becheva 2009), consider Banat Bulgarian a dialect of the Bulgarian language. Given the existence of Bulgarian literary language, they consider Banat Bulgarian a "second regional form of the Bulgarian literary language". However, most members of the Banat Bulgarian community[6] view Banat Bulgarian as a separate language. They

[4] The terms *Palćani, Palćeni, Pavlićeni* (in Serbian) "today function as a microethnonym, because it refers to the members of the former religious community of the Pavlićani" (Vasić 2016: 18).

[5] The monograph does not list the authors of the contributions and instead names the Institute for the Bulgarian Language as the publisher.

[6] From a language politics and planning (LPP) point of view, this is a so-called bottom-up

highlight two important distinctions: 1) the use of the Latin script and 2) the lack of mutual intelligibility with Bulgarians. Nomachi notes that this is predominantly the case in the Serbian part of Banat, while Banat Bulgarians in Romania "think they are Bulgarians and are happy to use the Cyrillic script in multilingual signs to show that they are a part of the Bulgarian nation" (Nomachi 2015: 418–419). The criterion of mutual intelligibility is highly subjective, but the reason for this difference could be that Serbian is a Slavic language much closer and similar to Bulgarian than Romanian. This could have made it much more receptive to the linguistic influence of the dominant state language, consequently leading to a higher variation and change in Banat Bulgarian in the Serbian part of the Banat region and less intelligibility with standard Bulgarian and other Bulgarian dialects. Banat Bulgarian is also linked to the term *literary micro language* (Duličenko 1981, 2003) in the literature. Most recently, Nomachi has mentioned Banat Bulgarian as one of the "Insular Slavic literary micro-languages" (Nomachi 2024: 647).[7] This term is largely dismissed by Bulgarian linguists, who argue that it separates Banat Bulgarian from its origin—the Bulgarian language (Antonova-Vasileva 2023: 428–429). Instead, they prefer the term *regional literary norm* (ibid.).[8] Nevertheless, most recent research does not provide a new perspective or a definite answer to the question of whether Banat Bulgarian is a language or a dialect, focusing instead on it as a variety that has a collection of features, some shared with Bulgarian, some distinct. This is the perspective that will be adopted in this chapter.

2.3. Origins and migration. Links to other ethnic groups in Serbia

A prominent theme in most papers about Banat Bulgarians and the variety they speak (Vučković 2010: 245, Nomachi 2015: 398–399, Nomachi

LPP, which means that the initiative comes from interested social groups, climbing up to official institutions (Filipović 2018: 88). Although equally important as a top-down LPP (i.e. from institutions to communities), the bottom-up LPP is much less taken into account (Filipović 2015).

[7] These languages "emerge as a result of migration to different areas in other Slavic or non-Slavic lands at different periods of time; (b) geographically, they are detached from their own ethnolinguistic root; (c) on a genetic level, they retain fairly clear links to their original linguistic root; (d) as for the form of the literary language [...], norms are formed or being formed" (Nomachi 2024: 647).

[8] However, there are also Bulgarian researchers who mention the term *literary micro language* in accordance with Banat Bulgarian (e.g. Mladenova 2014).

2016: 180–181, Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11, Belić & Nomachi 2018: 73) is the historical migration patterns of Banat Bulgarians from present-day Bulgaria to the Banat region, highlighting the waves of migration and settlement in Romania and Serbia. Banat Bulgarians migrated from northwest and north-central Bulgaria to the Banat region in several waves, mainly during the 17th and 18th centuries, in the aftermath of significant events such as the Čiprovci (Chiprovtsi) Uprising in 1688 (Čolov 1988). Banat Bulgarians first migrated to the present-day Romanian part of the Banat region.[9] In the late 18th and throughout the 19th century, Banat Bulgarians began to migrate from present-day Romanian Banat to present-day Serbian Banat "searching for work and better life conditions" (Belić & Nomachi 2018: 73).[10] Their community has historically been smaller than that of their counterparts in Romania. That is one of the primary reasons why these communities must be investigated separately. The Banat Bulgarians' openness to other (major) communities alongside whom they lived is most evident in heterogamy (intergroup marriages) with Hungarians, Serbs and Slovaks (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11, Nomachi 2020: 309). This resulted in multilingualism and eventually came to be considered a cause of the endangerment and loss of Banat Bulgarian (Sikimić 2007: 18–19). Since their relations with Slovaks seem rarer than those with Hungarians (Nomachi 2020: 297) and present mostly in Belo Blato, a village in the broader territory of the town of Zrenjanin (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11), it has been said that Banat Bulgarian is "under the strong influence of Serbian and Hungarian" (Nomachi 2020: 311). These two languages were considered more prestigious than Banat Bulgarian (Nomachi 2015: 413), which led to "diminishing the status of Banat Bulgarian" (Nomachi 2016: 187), which is now "only exceptionally used as a spoken language" (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 12).

[9] On their settlement in the Romanian part of Banat, Nomachi notes: "They finally settled in the commune of Vinga in the Banat in 1741. Other immigrants came to this region from the north-central region of Bulgaria, and they settled in Stár Bišnov (Dudeștii Vechi in Romanian) in the Banat in 1738. Thus, in the first stage of immigration, there were two different groups speaking different Bulgarian dialects; however, over time, their dialectal differences diminished, though the differences do exist even today." (Nomachi 2016: 180–181).

[10] For more precise data on this migration, see Telbis 1938, Telbizov & Vekova-Telbizova 1963, Njagulov 1999, Ćurčić & Jovanović 2014. There are reports that a small number of Banat Bulgarians have moved back from the Banat region to villages in Bulgaria, such as Bardarski Geran, Gostilja, Asenovo and Dragomirovo, in multiple waves after 1878, and that some migrated to more urban settlements (Njagulov 1999: 84, 87–102).

2.4. Demographic data

One of the vital pieces of information for assessing the vulnerability and endangerment of a language is the number of speakers (e.g. Brenzinger et al. 2003, Lee & van Way 2016). Therefore, a somewhat recurring type of data in many papers on Banat Bulgarians is their numbers and place of residence (see Vučković 2010: 247–248, Nomachi 2015: 395, Belić & Nomachi 2018: 73). As Biljana Sikimić and Motoki Nomachi state, "this number is difficult to determine since the census [in Serbia – A.B.] does not distinguish between Orthodox Bulgarians and Catholic Bulgarians" (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11). Hence, the number of Banat Bulgarians in Serbia is estimated relative to the number of Bulgarians in Vojvodina. Based on all research that contains data about the numbers of Banat Bulgarians in Serbia, we can establish a chronology of some sort about their population in Serbia. "Historically, Telbizov and Vekova-Telbizova (1963: 6) estimated that there were approximately 18,000 Banat Bulgarians throughout the Banat region, with approximately 12,000 in Romania and 6,000 in Serbia" (Nomachi 2015: 395). Therefore, between the 18th and 19th centuries, there were around 6,000 Banat Bulgarians in the part of the Banat region that nowadays belongs to Serbia. Although some estimates suggest that there were 3,000–4,000 Banat Bulgarians in Serbia in the early 2000s (Ivanova & Becheva 2003: 354), the 2002 Serbian Census registered only 1,259. Later on, Sikimić and Nomachi (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 11) estimated that there are around 1,000 Banat Bulgarians in Serbia, although the 2011 Census showed that there were 1,489 Bulgarians in the Vojvodina region, because that number might include Orthodox Bulgarians. The most recent population census (2022) has the option of intersecting data on religion and nationality,[11] suggesting there are 474 Catholic Bulgarians in the Vojvodina region (492 in all regions). As Figure 1 shows, the number of Banat Bulgarians in Serbia is steadily declining.

[11] It is important to note that, as mentioned in Section 2.1, religion no longer has the importance it once had among Banat Bulgarians and that some of our interviewees identified as atheists.

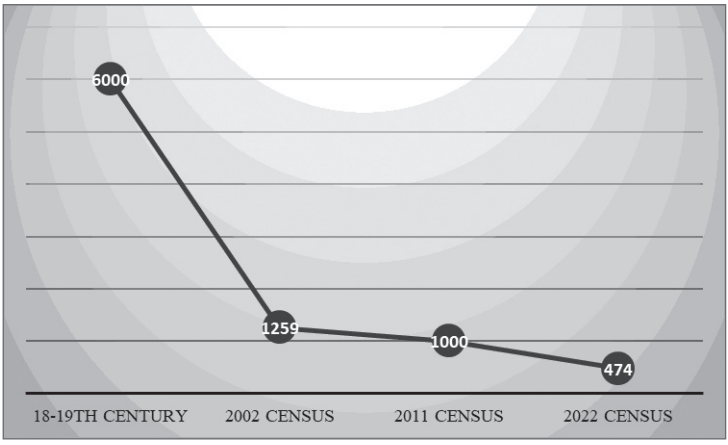

Figure 1: The number of Banat Bulgarians in Serbia.
(Unofficial numbers for 18-19th century retrieved from the literature)

2.5. Language standardisation

Banat Bulgarian was codified in the mid-19th century (Stoykov 1967: 9–23) by a local priest and teacher of German origin, Jozu Rill, from Modoš, now a village named Jaša Tomić (Vučković 2009: 7), which made it a literary language with the "Latin alphabet as a symbol of Catholicism" (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 12).[12] "The orthography has been changed twice (by Kossilkov in the 1880s and by Fermendžin in the 1930s)" (Nomachi 2015: 414–415). Publications included primers and religious books, but also secular books and periodicals such as *Náša glás* and *Literaturna miselj*.[13] The first linguistic books about the Banat Bulgarian literary language were published in the 1960s by Stoyko Stoykov in standard Bulgarian: *Banatskijat govor* (1967) and *Leksikata na banatskija govor* (1968). Unfortunately, Banat Bulgarian stopped being used as a literary language in the 1930s (Telbis 1938), and "until the end of the 20th century, there was no opportunity for its use" (Sikimić & Nomaći 2016: 12).[14] In the 1990s, a local priest from the village

[12] Antonova-Vasileva writes that "There was a certain period during which [Banat Bulgarian – A.B.] literature was written in Cyrillic" (Antonova-Vasileva 2024: 424, translation A.B.).

[13] For more details on literature and publications in Banat Bulgarian see Abadzhieva 2024a.

[14] Until the use of the Banat Bulgarian literary language and publications recently reappeared in Serbian Banat, the literary tradition of Banat Bulgarians was usually seen as a whole, covering both communities that nowadays belong to Serbia and Romania (Nomachi 2015).

of Belo Blato, Stojan Kalapiš, reintroduced the Banat Bulgarian language into his sermons (Belić & Nomachi 2018: 75). At the beginning of the 21st century, a local activist from Ivanovo (city of Pančevo), Josif Vasilčin-Mare

> "started publishing a multilingual newspaper *Ivanovački dobošar* 'Ivanovo Town Crier,' in 8 languages, including Banat Bulgarian [...] In addition, Mr. Vasilčin-Mare published a few books, whose number was severely limited [...] Mr. Vasilčin-Mare has also been collaborating intensively with a local folklorist, Mr. Augustin Kalapiš. In 2009 they offered a Banat Bulgarian language course in collaboration with the Pančevo-based NGO *In Medias Res*" (Belić & Nomachi 2018: 75–77).

The language course was discontinued in 2015 due to financial constraints. While it was still active, instructional materials were available thanks to Augustin Kalapiš, a member of the Banat Bulgarian community in Ivanovo. Kalapiš, in collaboration with Ognjan Cvetkov, a teacher of standard Bulgarian, published a primer and reader titled *Savremen balgarski ezik i balgarski palkenski ezik: Bukvar i citanka* [Primer and Reader of the Contemporary Bulgarian Language and the Bulgarian Pavlikian Language]. (Nomachi 2020: 302). The Banat Bulgarian literary language was also used by Magdalena Vasilčin-Doža from Ivanovo, who published collections of poetry titled *Ako mene još ima* / *Ak méne još ima* [If I Still Exist] in 2008 and *Upuznavanj sas stvárnust* / *Spoznaja stvarnosti* / *A valóság megismerése* [Cognition of Reality] in 2010. Her first collection is bilingual, in Serbian and Banat Bulgarian, while the second is trilingual, with Serbian, Banat Bulgarian and Hungarian.

3. Data and methodology

The data used in this chapter was collected in the Banat Bulgarian communities in four villages: Ivanovo (the municipality of Pančevo), Belo Blato (the municipality of Zrenjanin), Konak (the municipality of Sečanj) and Skorenovac (the municipality of Kovin) and, to a lesser extent, in four towns/cities (see Section 4). The data was collected as part of the project

Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia (VLingS).[15] The sociolinguistic questionnaire created for this project was used to collect the data on which this chapter is based. Throughout the duration of this project, two versions of the questionnaire were developed: the pilot version, *VLingS Questionnaire 0.0*, and the main version, *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*. Both versions contain sixteen sections of questions (for details on the *VLingS Questionnaire 0.0*, see Mirić, Sokolovska & Sorescu-Marinković 2024).[16]

The difference between the two versions is that some questions were left out from the main version because they provided overlapping information and their exclusion allowed more efficient and time-saving data entry. Nevertheless, the sections stayed unchanged. Both versions of the VLingS questionnaire were employed in the community of Banat Bulgarians in 2022 and 2023, respectively.[17] The Banat Bulgarians are a rather small community in Serbia, and our sample reflects this: eight respondents filled out the *VLingS Questionnaire 0.0* and twenty-nine the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*. Some respondents participated in both rounds of research, but their responses were counted only once (from the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*), bringing their total number to thirty-two. For this study, a hybrid base was created: it contains the answers of thirty-two respondents to questions that can be found in both the pilot and the main version of the questionnaire. Questions from each of the question sections were chosen. Since the data

[15] The varieties included in this project are Banat Bulgarian, Romani, Vlach, Vojvodina Rusyn or Ruthenian, Judezmo, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian and Bayash-Romanian. The project's objective was to develop a precise tool for assessing the degree of language endangerment and vulnerability (questionnaire) and to apply it to a significant sample of speakers of vulnerable linguistic varieties in Serbia. Alongside the questionnaire, speech samples of the selected linguistic varieties were documented and archived, providing valuable data for ongoing and future research (for more information about this project, see the Introduction in this volume).

[16] These sections are I General data about linguonyms and language usage; II Data about language acquisition and intergenerational language transmission; III Domains of language usage; IV Literacy; V Education; VI Institutional support and linguistic landscape; VII Publications in the given language; VIII Media; IX Religious service; X Cultural events; XI Language level self-assessment; XII Respondents' feelings towards own language; XIII Ethnic and cultural identity; XIV Language maintenance and revitalisation; XV Demographic information about the respondent; XVI Final remarks (see the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* in the Appendix of this book).

[17] The researchers who collected the data are Anđela Babić and Dalibor Sokolović (for more details see Redžić & Sokolović 2023).

obtained via the questionnaire is vast and each section could be the topic of a stand-alone paper, for this chapter, we selected several question groups that best represent the findings. Those question groups can be divided according to themes: intergenerational transmission, language use (oral and written), self-assessment of language level and attitudes towards the variety, Banat Bulgarian in education, institutions, the linguistic landscape, cultural events and religious service.

This analysis is based on descriptive statistics. Basic statistical data was obtained using the SPSS programme for each question chosen for the analysis; based on that, for some questions, combined tables and charts were made in Excel, which allows for a better understanding and representation of the data. For example, we combined the answers to the questions (1) and (2) in Section 5.1. (see Figure 2) to form a unified chart. The analysis can be perceived as having two parts divided by theme. In the first, larger part, based primarily on descriptive statistics, the level of endangerment of the language is presented through questions related to intergenerational transmission, language use (oral and written), self-assessment of language level, and attitudes towards the studied variety. In the second part of the analysis, we provide an overview of the state of Banat Bulgarian in more official and public settings and its status outside the community.

4. Sample: basic demographic information

There were 32 respondents. Fifty percent were male and fifty percent female. Most respondents live in the countryside (84.4%; Belo Blato N=7, Ivanovo N=13, Konak N=2, Skorenovac N=5), while a minority resides in cities or towns (15.6%; Novi Sad N=1, Pančevo N=2, Zrenjanin N=1, Bratislava[18] N=1). Regarding age, respondents were categorised into four generations: generation 1 (age range: 18–29, N of respondents=2), generation 2 (age range: 30–44, N=3), generation 3 (age range: 45–59, N=13), generation 4 (age range: 60+, N=14). Notably, the majority of respondents belong to the third and fourth generations. The majority of respondents declared Bulgarian nationality – 71.9%, while 9.4% claimed dual nationality – Serbian and Bulgarian. The same percentage of respondents chose the answer

[18] The participant residing in Bratislava is a student there but frequently stays in her place of birth – Belo Blato, where we interviewed her.

"other" to the question on nationality, and 6.3% (two respondents) said that they are Serbian. One participant (3.1%) did not answer this question. The question about religion confirmed close ties with Catholicism – 90.6% self-identified as Catholic. One participant (3.1%) identified as an Orthodox Christian, and two (6.3%) said they were not religious. As for education, 6.3% of respondents did not finish elementary school, while 25% did. Those who have a high school diploma make up 50% of the sample (21.9% of them graduated from a three-year vocational school and 28.1% from a high school/gymnasium), 6.3% have a diploma from a higher vocational school and 12.5% have graduated from a university/academy.

5. Analysis and discussion

5.1. Intergenerational transmission

Most methodologies for evaluating language vitality and endangerment prioritise intergenerational language transmission as the principal criterion for determining the degree of language endangerment (cf. Fishman 1991, Brenzinger et al. 2003, Lewis & Simons 2010, Lee & van Way 2016). To assess intergenerational language transmission within the Banat Bulgarian community, we examine the responses to three specific questions in the VLingS questionnaire: (1) Which language(s) do you use? (2a) Which language(s) does/did your mother speak? (2b) Which language(s) does/did your father speak? and (3) Do your children speak Banat Bulgarian? Questions (1) and (2) were open-ended, but for the purpose of analysis, all responses were categorised into one of seven possible combinations: 1) Serbian; 2) Banat Bulgarian; 3) Other; 4) Serbian and another language; 5) Banat Bulgarian and another language; 6) Serbian, Banat Bulgarian, and another language; and 7) Serbian and Banat Bulgarian. The third question focused more specifically on the Banat Bulgarian variety, and thus its responses were not directly comparable to those of the first two questions. Nevertheless, by examining the charts side by side (Figure 2 and Figure 3), certain comparisons can be drawn.

Firstly, the data harvested from questions 1 and 2 (Figure 2) indicate a multilingual environment with the marked use of both Serbian and Banat Bulgarian, often in combination with other languages. The highest

percentage of participants (71.9%) reported speaking Serbian, Banat Bulgarian, and another language. In contrast, Banat Bulgarian was the most frequently cited as the language spoken by their parents, with 62.5% for mothers and 71.9% for fathers. Notably, 9.4% of participants said that they spoke Serbian and another language, while 3.1% reported speaking just one other language. No respondents claimed to speak exclusively Serbian or exclusively Banat Bulgarian. The other languages commonly spoken within the Banat Bulgarian community include Hungarian (in Skorenovac, Ivanovo, and Konak) and Slovak (in Belo Blato). The respondents who selected the option "another language" or "Serbian and another language" originate from Skorenovac (Kovin), where Hungarians form the majority population. In this context, the few remaining Banat Bulgarians often assimilate into the Hungarian community. It has been previously established that Banat Bulgarians in Skorenovac underwent linguistic assimilation which resulted in their use of only Hungarian due to several factors beyond the larger size of the Hungarian minority in the village (Vukov Rafai & Rafai 2021). These factors include shared religion, mixed marriages, and asymmetrical language knowledge: while Banat Bulgarians (and other minorities, such as Germans) spoke Hungarian, Hungarians did not learn Banat Bulgarian (Vukov Rafai & Rafai 2021: 674, 679). Data from our fieldwork corroborates these findings. A slightly larger percentage of respondents (15.6%) reported speaking Serbian and Banat Bulgarian, while 12.5% indicated speaking Banat Bulgarian and another language. All interviews were conducted in Serbian, confirming that all participants were proficient in this language. However, their responses reflect the languages they consider their own or the languages with which they identify.

The comparison between the highest percentages of languages spoken by parents and those spoken by participants reveals a significant difference in language use (see Figure 2): parents were predominantly monolingual, using Banat Bulgarian, whereas their children, the respondents, are mostly multilingual, suggesting a more reduced use of Banat Bulgarian. This substantial difference may be attributed to mixed marriages, implying that parents also spoke another language in addition to Banat Bulgarian. However, respondents may have interpreted the question as referring to "which language was their own" or "which language they identified with". Consequently, it can be concluded that the perspective on language and linguistic identity of respondents as opposed to their parents' has shifted

and broadened. This could be due to their parents' or their own mixed marriages, leading them to claim two or multiple languages as their own. Another important influence might come from the education system and the media, in which the Serbian language is dominant.

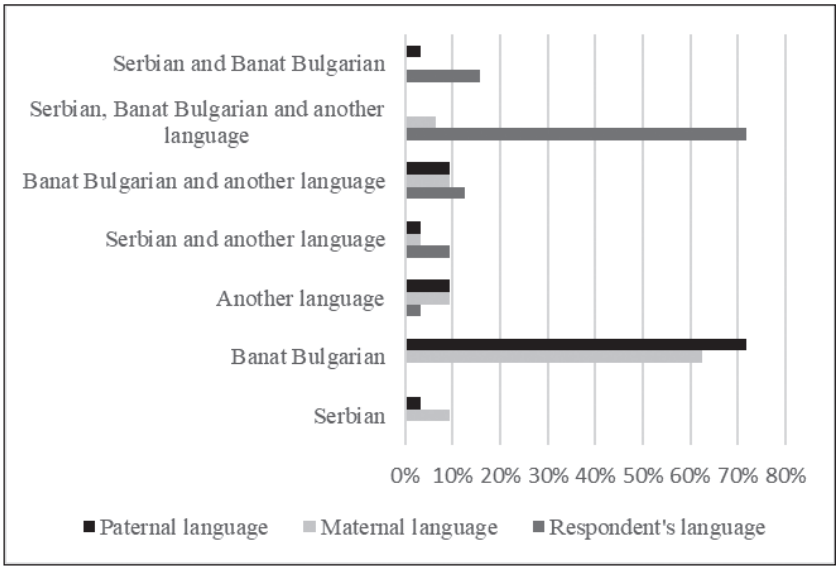

Figure 2: Language(s) of the respondents and their mother and father.

Regarding the use of Banat Bulgarian among the respondents' children, 34.4% of respondents stated that their children were fluent in the variety. An equal number of children (15.6%) can use either some words or simple sentences, while a smaller group (9.4%) does not use the variety at all. A quarter of respondents (24%) do not have children, or their children have yet to develop language skills. Therefore, it could be said that a significant percentage of the respondents' children are fluent in Banat Bulgarian. However, when considering the answers to previous questions, a new question arises: When and how often do children use the variety? Additionally, the notable percentage of those speakers who are capable of using only simple sentences and some words suggests a potential further decline in intergenerational language transmission of Banat Bulgarian. This indicates a concerning trend for the future vitality of the language.

5.2. Language use

The domains of language use are also a crucial factor in the assessment of language endangerment (e.g. language use is included among UNESCO's criteria for language endangerment, see Moseley 2010: 12). The questions from the VLingS questionnaire used for this part of the analysis are: (1) What language(s) do you use? (2) Which language/languages do you use most frequently today? (3) How often (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never, N/A) do you use Banat Bulgarian in conversations with the following persons: (a) family; (b) friends; (c) neighbours; (d) colleagues; (e) members of the clergy; (f) public officials?; and (4) In which language do you more frequently discuss (a) private; (b) social topics? The first two questions were open-ended, but the answers were categorised with a focus on Banat Bulgarian and Serbian (the official state language), while other languages were collectively referred to as "other languages". The fourth question aimed to investigate the distribution of language use between Banat Bulgarian and Serbian across different conversation topics.

The first two questions (Figure 3) reveal key insights into language use among the Banat Bulgarian community. Most respondents (71.9%) claim to speak Serbian, Banat Bulgarian, and another language. However, more than half (53.1%) reported using Serbian most often. The second most frequent result (15.6%) for languages spoken was "Serbian and Banat Bulgarian". An identical percentage (15.6%) indicated "another language" as the response to the question (2). A smaller share of respondents (9.4%) stated that they primarily use Serbian and Banat Bulgarian, and the same percentage uses Serbian and another language, or Serbian, Banat Bulgarian, and another language.

These two questions highlight a marked discrepancy between the languages spoken by the members of the Banat Bulgarian community and the language they predominantly use. Although Banat Bulgarians are typically multilingual, Serbian emerges as the most dominant language in their daily interactions. It is also noteworthy that "another language" was the second most frequent response to question (2), indicating that not only Serbian but other minority languages dominate Banat Bulgarian, as well.

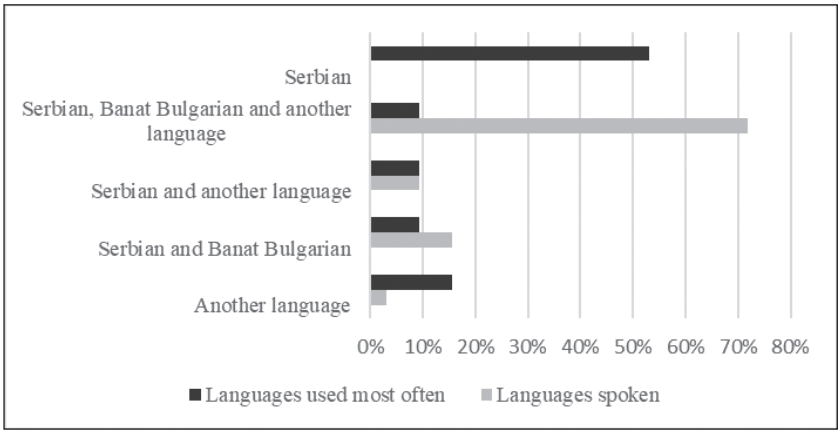

Figure 3: Language(s) that the respondents use and those that they use most often.

The third question (Figure 4), "How often the respondents use Banat Bulgarian with different interlocutors", revealed that Banat Bulgarian is predominantly spoken at home. Regular interaction (answer: always) with family in Banat Bulgarian is relatively high: 46.9%. The percentage of those who often speak Banat Bulgarian with family is relatively low, 12.5%, while 21.9% of respondents indicated they use the language sometimes. No one reported rarely using Banat Bulgarian with family, while 6.3% never used it in this setting.[19] For 12.5% of respondents, the answer was N/A (non-applicable) as they do not have any family members who speak Banat Bulgarian. In the second group, "friends", regular interaction in Banat Bulgarian is lower than in the family (18.8%). The highest percentage falls under the "sometimes" category (25%), while "often" is reported by 12.5%. Additionally, 9.4% of Banat Bulgarians rarely speak this variety with friends, and 3.1% never interact with their friends in Banat Bulgarian. 37.5% of respondents do not have any friends who speak Banat Bulgarian. Regular interaction with neighbours in Banat Bulgarian is lower, 12.5%, compared to family and friends. In this group, the response "sometimes" came out

[19] A similar question was asked in the community of Banat Bulgarians in Romania (villages of Star Bešenov and Vinga): "Which language do you speak with your family?" and the results were: 50% speak Palken [Pavlikian – A.B.], 15% Palken and Romanian (Vlach), 10% Romanian (Vlach) and Bulgarian, 5% Banat Bulgarian and Romanian, 5% Banatian, 5% Romanian, 10% no answer (Abadzhieva 2024b). With this question, Abadzhieva emphasised the importance of documenting the various names used for the Banat Bulgarian variety. However, considering this, it becomes evident that Banat Bulgarian is more commonly used in family settings in Romania than in Serbia.

on top (28.1%). Additionally, 9.4% of Banat Bulgarians rarely speak their variety with neighbours. The percentage of respondents who never interact with their neighbours in Banat Bulgarian is relatively low, 3.1%, while 40.6% do not have Banat Bulgarians as neighbours. Half of the respondents (50%) do not have colleagues with whom they can speak Banat Bulgarian, and a considerable percentage (31.3%) stated that they never use their variety at the workplace. An equal percentage of respondents (6.3%) claimed that they rarely or sometimes speak Banat Bulgarian with colleagues, while regular interaction with colleagues in Banat Bulgarian is very low (3.1%), indicating that the language is rarely used in professional settings. Regarding interaction with religious leaders or clergy in the Banat Bulgarian community, it is notable that almost half of the respondents (46.9%) answered that they either do not have priests who can speak Banat Bulgarian or are unaware of any (classified as N/A). A considerable percentage (31.3%) never interact with religious leaders in Banat Bulgarian, while 15.6% sometimes speak it with this group, and 6.3% rarely do so. Similarly, almost half of the respondents (46.9%) stated that there are no officials at public institutions (e.g. at the municipality/local community/post office/police) with whom they can speak Banat Bulgarian. A significant percentage (28.1%) never interact with officials in this variety. Nonetheless, the percentage of those who sometimes do is notable (21.9%), while the percentage of those who often or always converse in Banat Bulgarian with officials is 3.1%.

These results require further explanation based on the qualitative data gathered in the field, separately from the questionnaire. Those who speak Banat Bulgarian with colleagues and officials are usually the same people, and they reside in Ivanovo. This is because they themselves work as officials and have colleagues from their community, enabling them to speak Banat Bulgarian with each other. However, these interactions typically occur outside of official settings, in casual conversations during breaks or when they are alone. As Banat Bulgarians explain, they know everyone who speaks their variety. Consequently, whenever a third person who does not speak Banat Bulgarian or is not comfortable enough to use it happens to be present, they adapt by switching to another language. Similarly, there is only one priest who speaks Banat Bulgarian, and he lives in the village next to Belo Blato. This limited presence of Banat Bulgarian-speaking clergy further reduces opportunities for conversations in the variety to occur within religious settings. Further, the results underscore the limited and declining use of Banat Bulgarian in formal domains.

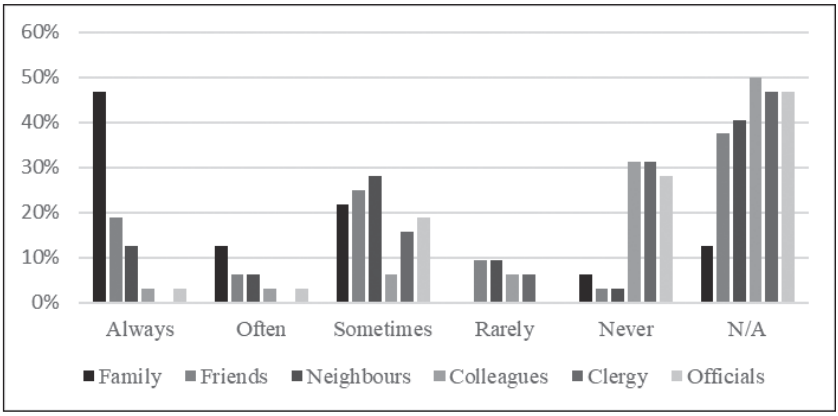

Figure 4: How often the respondents use Banat Bulgarian with different interlocutors.

The fourth question examined which language, Serbian or Banat Bulgarian, is more frequently used for private and social conversation topics (Figure 5). The majority of respondents (56.3%) reported using Serbian in private conversations. A smaller percentage (12.5%) use Banat Bulgarian for private topics, while 28.1% of respondents use the two languages equally often. A small percentage (3.1%) was unsure which language they used for private conversations. Serbian is predominantly used to discuss social topics, with 68.8% of respondents using it for such conversations. Only 6.3% of respondents use Banat Bulgarian for social conversations. However, a higher percentage (21.9%) use both languages equally often for social topics. Similar to private topics, a small percentage (3.1%) were unsure which language they used for social conversations.

The results for this question show that the use of Banat Bulgarian falls behind the use of Serbian not only for social topics but for private ones as well. Serbian is more prevalent in private topics that one might discuss with the closest people in their life. This conclusion aligns with the findings from the previous question: Banat Bulgarian is confined to use among very few people and in special circumstances. These results suggest that while Banat Bulgarian is maintained within close-knit, private circles, its broader usage is limited. The community increasingly relies on Serbian for both social and intimate conversations, further highlighting the dominant role of Serbian in daily communication and the declining intergenerational transmission of Banat Bulgarian.

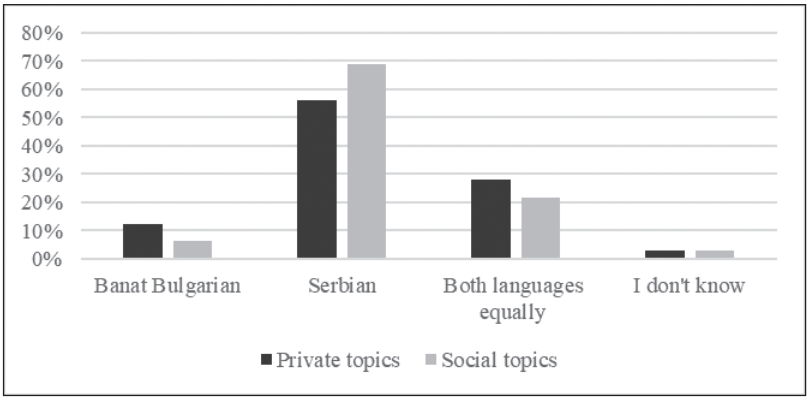

Figure 5: Languages used for private and social topics of conversation.

5.2.1. Reading and writing

In addition to examining language use in social interactions, we also explored reading (Figure 6) and writing habits (Figure 7) in both Banat Bulgarian and Serbian to identify any potential differences in these types of language usage.

The majority of respondents (62.5%) reported reading in Serbian all the time, whereas no one claimed to read in Banat Bulgarian all the time (see Figure 6). An equal percentage of respondents (15.6%) read in Serbian often and sometimes, while a small percentage (6.3%) rarely engage in this activity. Just over a third of Banat Bulgarians (34.4%) rarely read in their variety, and a slightly smaller portion (31%) sometimes does. A similar percentage (28.1%) never reads in Banat Bulgarian. Only 3.1% of Banat Bulgarians reported reading in Banat Bulgarian often.

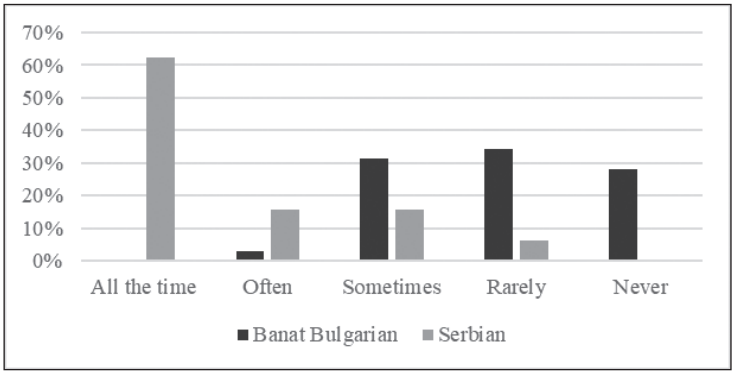

Figure 6: How often the respondents read in Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

Similar to the results for reading, half of the respondents (50%) reported writing in Serbian all the time (see Figure 7). A smaller percentage (9.4%) write in Banat Bulgarian all the time. The percentages for those who write in Serbian often, sometimes, and rarely are 21.9%, 15.6%, and 12.5%, respectively. The majority of Banat Bulgarians rarely write in their variety (43.8%), and under a third (31.3%) never write in Banat Bulgarian. A smaller percentage (9.4%) sometimes write in Banat Bulgarian and only 3.1% do so often. The data on the type of content written in Banat Bulgarian aligns with the findings from the previous section, indicating that this language variety is predominantly used in highly private contexts. A notable percentage of respondents (37.5%) reported using Banat Bulgarian only for personal messages, such as SMS or Viber communications. In contrast, Serbian is primarily used for writing on social media (59.4%), letters and emails (78.1%), and other similar situations (34.4%).

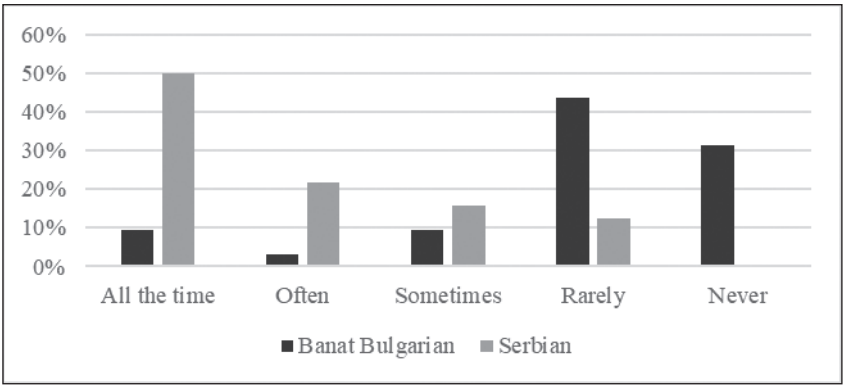

Figure 7: How often the respondents write in Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

By observing both charts, it is noticeable that "never" is never the answer for using the Serbian language. In contrast, it features quite prominently for reading and writing in Banat Bulgarian. Accordingly, the answer "all the time" is the most frequent for the Serbian language, while only three respondents write equally frequently in their variety. These observations underline the dominant role of Serbian in both spoken and written form within the Banat Bulgarian community. The infrequent use of Banat Bulgarian for reading and writing suggests a decline in literacy skills in the variety, further contributing to its endangered status.

5.3. Self-assessment of language level and attitudes towards the variety

An important component of the VLingS questionnaire is the respondents' self-assessment of language level. This part of the analysis investigates how well Banat Bulgarians understand, speak, read, and write in both Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

5.3.1. Self-assessment of language competence

Serbian is almost universally understood at an excellent level, with 90.6% of the respondents rating their understanding as excellent (Figure 8). In contrast, proficiency in understanding Banat Bulgarian is more varied: 53.1% rated their understanding as excellent, with notable percentages at other proficiency levels. Serbian is also rated as very well (3.1%) or well understood (6.3%). Conversely, some respondents (3.1%) said they could not understand Banat Bulgarian at all. Additionally, while some individuals understand it poorly, others rated their understanding as good (12.5%) or very good (25%) (Figure 8). This distribution indicates that a significant portion of the community understands Banat Bulgarian at a high level, but it is not as uniformly understood as Serbian.

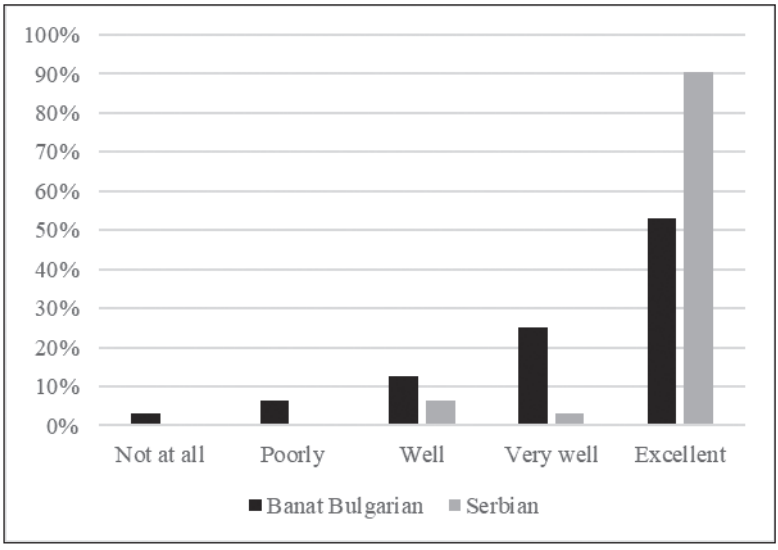

Figure 8: How well the respondents understand Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

The self-assessment of speaking competence (Figure 9) reveals that this skill is better rated by members of the Banat Bulgarian community than understanding. The top three ratings were: well (12.5% for Banat Bulgarian, 9.4% for Serbian), very well (31.3% for Banat Bulgarian, 18.8% for Serbian), and excellent (43.8% for Banat Bulgarian, 71.9% for Serbian). Notably, 12.5% of participants indicated that they do not speak Banat Bulgarian at all, suggesting the presence of some passive speakers (Figure 9). Overall, Serbian is spoken very well by the majority, with most rating their speaking ability as excellent. While Banat Bulgarian also demonstrates high speaking proficiency, it is less pronounced compared to Serbian.

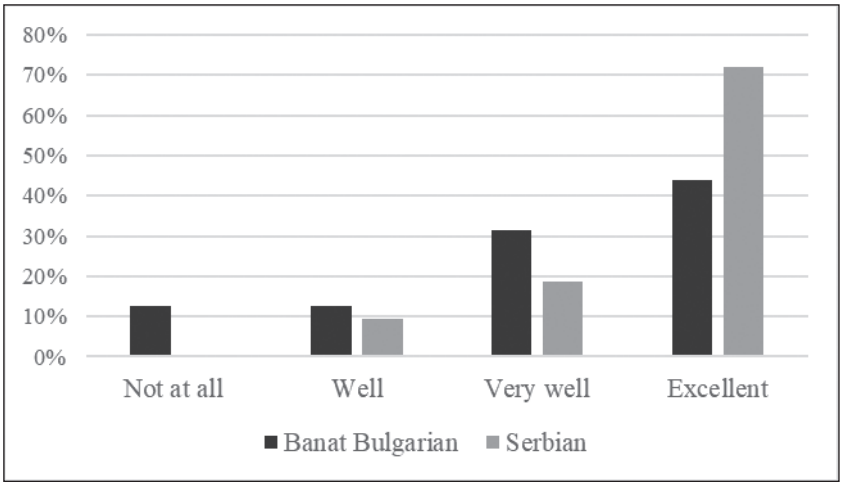

Figure 9: How well the respondents speak Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

Serbian reading proficiency is notably high (Figure 10), with 81.3% of respondents rating it as excellent. In contrast, reading proficiency in Banat Bulgarian shows more variation: 25% rated their reading ability as excellent, with an equal percentage (25%) rating it as poor. Additionally, 12.5% of respondents indicated that they do not read in Banat Bulgarian at all. Nonetheless, 25% of participants reported reading Banat Bulgarian very well, and 12.5% rated their reading ability as good (Figure 10). This suggests a split where some community members maintain strong literacy skills in Banat Bulgarian, while many do not use the variety in written form. For Serbian, only 12.5% of respondents rated their reading as very good, and 6.3% rated it as good.

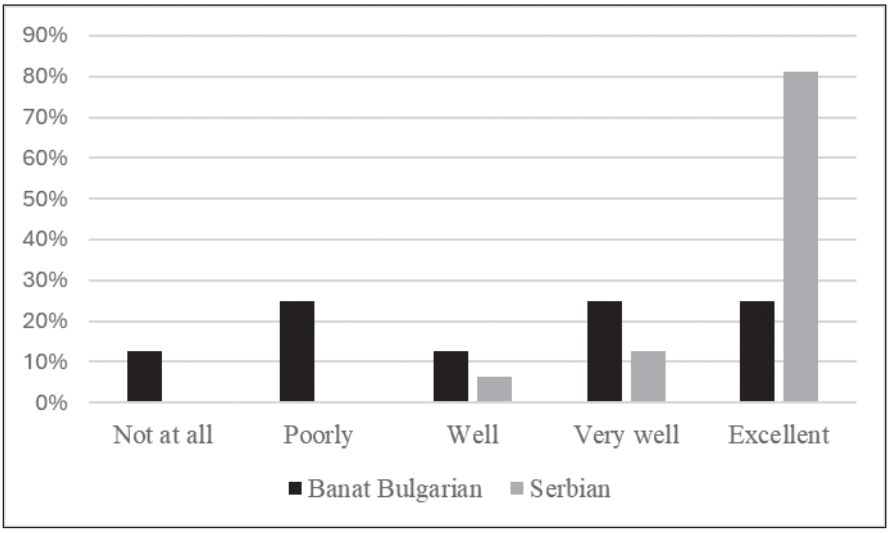

Figure 10: How well the respondents read in Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

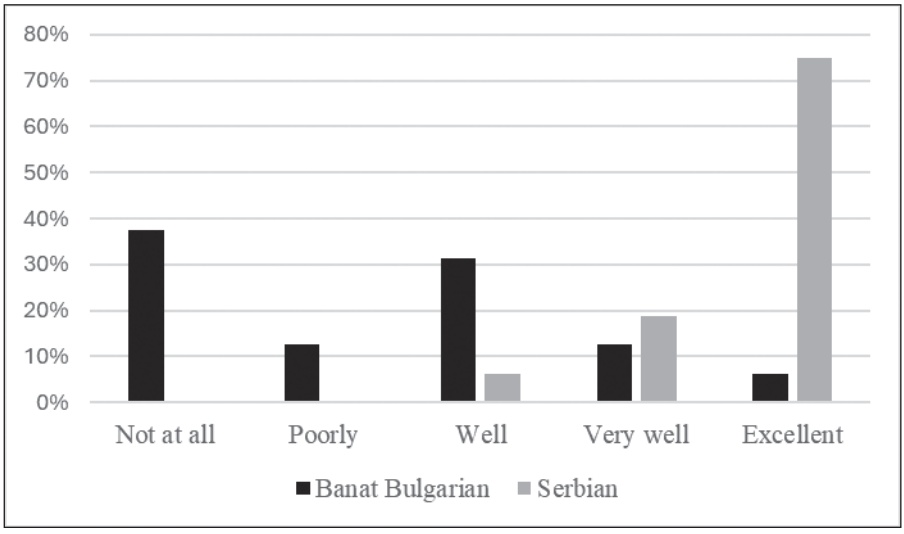

Figure 11: How well the respondents write in Banat Bulgarian and Serbian.

Among the self-assessed skills, writing in Banat Bulgarian received the lowest rating (Figure 11). A significant portion of respondents (37.5%) indicated that they do not write in their variety at all, and 12.5% described their writing ability as poor (Figure 11). Conversely, a notable percentage of

respondents rated their writing skills as good (31.3%), very good (12.5%), or excellent (6.3%). This indicates that while a portion of the community retains writing skills in Banat Bulgarian, a significant number have little to no ability to write in the variety. Writing skills in Serbian, however, received a more favourable evaluation, with the majority (75%) rating their ability as excellent. The remaining respondents self-assessed their writing skills as very good (18.8%) or good (6.3%).

This data suggests that respondents tend to be more proficient in Serbian across all skills. The community shows high proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing Serbian, with this language never rated lower than "well". In contrast, proficiency in Banat Bulgarian is more varied, with a significant portion of the community not engaging in reading or writing in the variety. The presence of passive speakers and the lower proficiency in literacy skills suggest that Banat Bulgarian is being replaced by Serbian, especially in written contexts.

5.3.2. Attitudes towards the variety

In response to the question "Do you think Banat Bulgarian is important?", 82.8% of respondents answered affirmatively, 6.9% said it is "partially important", and 10.3% replied that Banat Bulgarian is not important. To the question "Does your language represent your community and the culture of your community?", 89.7% answered "yes", 6.9% believed it "partially represents", and 3.4%—or one individual—said that it does not represent the community and culture. A comparison of these two questions reveals a higher level of consensus on whether the Banat Bulgarian variety defines the community and culture, although a higher percentage of respondents view the language as not important compared to those who believe it does not represent the community. The reason for this discrepancy may be that Banat Bulgarians often associate the identity of their community with religion and other cultural symbols, such as traditional clothing, dances, and cuisine. These results may reflect the perception among respondents that their community is in decline, with no apparent means to stop or reverse this trend. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that, for most Banat Bulgarians, their language is considered important both generally and as a symbol of their community. It is important to note the diversity of attitudes and relationships towards the variety in different settlements. Responses indicating "Banat Bulgarian is not important" were most commonly given

by respondents from Skorenovac, where the interviewed Banat Bulgarians predominantly speak Hungarian.

5.4. Banat Bulgarian in education, institutions and the linguistic landscape

As previously noted, Banat Bulgarians are not officially recognised as a minority group in Serbia. Consequently, there are no institutions where Banat Bulgarian is an official language. Although Banat Bulgarians are generally associated with and identified as Bulgarians, there is only one school that teaches standard Bulgarian as an optional subject. This is the elementary school in Ivanovo. In our interviews with him, the teacher of standard Bulgarian at this institution said that he aims to incorporate Banat Bulgarian into the curriculum by including texts such as songs and short stories, although the predominant focus remains on standard Bulgarian.[20] Officials from the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria have stated that they presented Banat Bulgarians in Belo Blato with the opportunity to introduce standard Bulgarian into the primary school in this village as well, but by the summer of 2024, when we last did our fieldwork in the community, that has not materialised. All respondents said that neither they nor their siblings and relatives had the opportunity to learn Banat Bulgarian in school; it has always been a language they learned and used exclusively at home. Moreover, there are no opportunities to study Banat Bulgarian outside school. Many respondents recalled that the cultural centre in Ivanovo once offered language courses taught by the late Augustin Kalapiš, but discontinued them due to a lack of interest. Additionally, fieldwork findings suggest that there is currently no one capable or willing to teach Banat Bulgarian. This may be attributed to the high regard Banat Bulgarians (the ones with whom we spoke) have for education and learning, which has fostered a prevailing belief that no qualified individuals are available to conduct such lessons.

When asked whether they know of any institution that supports the realisation of minority rights, only 21.9% of respondents answered "yes", identifying the Bulgarian Embassy as such an institution. In contrast, 43.8%

[20] As Nomachi states, "as a Bulgarian minority, the Banat Bulgarians have begun a relationship of cooperation with other Bulgarian minorities and the Bulgarian government. In 2008, [standard – A.B.] Bulgarian was introduced in a school in Ivanovo as an elective subject and it is still available to this day" (Nomachi 2015: 418–419). This was also confirmed in our field research in 2023 by the standard Bulgarian teacher Ognjan Cvetkov.

answered "no", and 34.4% were unsure. Additionally, respondents frequently mentioned the Cultural Centre "Žarko Zrenjanin" in Ivanovo (Pančevo). This institution often hosts events related to the preservation of ethnic communities, including the Banat Bulgarian community (for more details, see the next section).

The linguistic landscape in Banat Bulgarian communities was extensively studied several years ago (see Sikimić & Nomaći 2016), and little has changed since then. The only place where Banat Bulgarian appears in official inscriptions is the village of Ivanovo. These inscriptions are visible on municipal buildings, the elementary school, street signs, and even unofficial inscriptions, such as on tombstones at the local cemetery. In contrast, other villages included in the research did not exhibit such widespread use of Banat Bulgarian: there are very few inscriptions in Banat Bulgarian on tombstones. Interestingly, the level of knowledge and interest in these inscriptions varies among community members in different villages. While Banat Bulgarians in Ivanovo take pride in their village's use of Banat Bulgarian in both official and unofficial contexts, some respondents in Belo Blato reported that their community was informed about the possibility of petitioning for official inscriptions in Banat Bulgarian. However, they chose not to pursue this as they use the languages that are present in official inscriptions—Hungarian, Serbian, and Slovak—and saw no need for additional inscriptions. Furthermore, some respondents in Belo Blato (31.3%) answered they did not know of any inscription on tombstones, although our visit to the local cemetery revealed some relatively recent inscriptions in Banat Bulgarian. Respondents in Skorenovac and Konak reported that there were inscriptions in Banat Bulgarian in their cemeteries, though these were described as very old. The residents of these two places predominantly use Hungarian in both oral and written communication.

5.5. Cultural events and religious service

An important aspect of language preservation involves its integration into cultural life and, particularly for Banat Bulgarians, religious practices (see Section 2).

The initial set of questions in this section addresses the availability and consumption of content in Banat Bulgarian across various media and cultural forms, including libraries, radio shows, TV shows, newspapers, websites, and social media. Responses to these questions predominantly

indicated a lack of such resources or limited awareness about them, with affirmative answers never exceeding 20%. Notable exceptions include the questions regarding libraries and TV shows. Regarding libraries, 25% of respondents confirmed the presence of Banat Bulgarian books, primarily referring to the collection in the Cultural Centre "Žarko Zrenjanin" in Ivanovo. Additionally, some respondents from Belo Blato mentioned that their parish house has books (mostly religious) from the neighbouring Timişoara, across the border, in Romania. As for TV shows, 31.3% of respondents reported the existence of the one-hour program "Bulgarian Roses", which airs weekly on "TV Pančevo" and is produced by the standard Bulgarian teacher from Ivanovo, Ognjan Cvetkov. Interestingly, some Banat Bulgarians from Belo Blato reported occasional access to Banat Bulgarian programs on radio or TV based in Timişoara. Media formats with the lowest awareness among respondents include websites (6.3%) and social media (9.4%). The low awareness of these digital media formats may be attributed to demographic factors, such as limited internet usage among members of the older generation. However, even younger respondents displayed limited familiarity with these resources. Consumption of Banat Bulgarian content was notably low, with less than 10% of respondents engaging with most media types, except for the TV show, which 28% follow.

Another set of questions explored cultural events and activities aimed at language preservation. A notable disparity emerged: 43% of respondents affirmed the presence of cultural events dedicated to their community, while only 18.8% affirmed the existence of activities specifically aimed at language preservation. Examples of the former include the annual "Banat Bulgarian Meeting", usually held in Ivanovo. Additionally, the "National Day of the Mother Tongue", an annual event at the Cultural Centre of Ivanovo, where various national minorities perform songs, recitations, or dances, was cited. Other examples of cultural events include folk dance training (which respondents indicated is no longer active) and sporadic activities such as choir practices, folk dance lessons, and language workshops. These activities, however, have either ceased or are infrequently conducted.

In contrast, religious events reflect the ongoing significance of the church within the Banat Bulgarian community despite rising secularism. A significant 75% of respondents confirmed the existence of religious services conducted in Banat Bulgarian periodically in Belo Blato and on occasion in Ivanovo; 71.9% reported having attended such services.

6. Conclusions

This chapter investigated the vulnerability of Banat Bulgarian in Serbia based on the data obtained through the sociolinguistic questionnaire implemented in the community of its speakers. The questionnaire was completed by 32 respondents, who mostly live in the countryside, in villages known for their Banat Bulgarian residents – Ivanovo, Skorenovac, Belo Blato and Konak.

The data on intergenerational transmission reveals a significant decline in the use of Banat Bulgarian: the generation of the respondents' parents was predominantly monolingual, according to the results of the questionnaire, using only Banat Bulgarian, while the respondents are mostly multilingual, using Banat Bulgarian alongside other languages. Many of the respondents' children are fluent in Banat Bulgarian, although there is also a notable share of those speakers who can only use simple sentences and some words. Although this data could, in itself, suggest a potential further decline in intergenerational language transmission of Banat Bulgarian, information on language use additionally establishes Banat Bulgarian as extremely endangered.

Serbian emerged as the dominant language in daily interactions among Banat Bulgarians. Banat Bulgarian is also suppressed by other minority languages, such as Hungarian and Slovak, since "another language" was the second most frequent response to the question "Which language/languages do you use most frequently?" Banat Bulgarian is primarily confined to home use with close family and friends and is never used in official settings. Since they are multilingual, Banat Bulgarians always adapt to their interlocutors' language, even in settings where they are the majority. Those who claim to use Banat Bulgarian in day-to-day conversations still predominantly use Serbian for discussing both social and private topics. Literacy skills in Banat Bulgarian are much less present, with many of the respondents never reading and writing in this variety.

An important part of the analysis involved the self-assessment of language skills and attitudes towards Banat Bulgarian. This revealed a clear dominance of the Serbian language. Serbian consistently received positive ratings, with evaluations of good, very good, or excellent. In contrast, respondents frequently assessed their proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing in Banat Bulgarian as poor or non-existent.

Despite this, the majority of respondents considered Banat Bulgarian important, believing it symbolises their community and culture.

Banat Bulgarian is absent from the school system and official institutions in Serbia. Its presence is largely limited to the linguistic landscape of Ivanovo, where it appears on official signs. In other locations, Banat Bulgarian inscriptions are found only in graveyards. The variety is also minimally represented in cultural life, radio and TV broadcasts, websites, and social media. Furthermore, only a small number of respondents indicated that they follow such content in their language.

This analysis underscores the endangered status of Banat Bulgarian, emphasizing the dominance of Serbian and the limited use and transmission of Banat Bulgarian. The variety is largely absent from most examined areas, confined to specific situations, and increasingly resembles a distant symbol of the community, akin to traditional clothing. These findings point to a critical need for measures to preserve and revitalise this endangered variety. However, a more definitive conclusion requires further research, with detailed attention to each question in the questionnaire and a particular focus on top-down strategies for language preservation.

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