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WHEN TWO ROMA COMMUNITIES MEET: CONSEQUENCES FOR THE VULNERABILITY OF ROMANI IN THE BELGRADE SUBURB OF BATAJNICA

Abstract: This chapter explores language vulnerability in two Roma communities residing in the Belgrade suburban settlement of Batajnica: Sremski Roma and Arli Roma. These communities settled in the area at different times; they speak different Romani dialects and belong to different religious denominations. Based on the responses to the sociolinguistic *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* conducted during fieldwork in 2023, the research focuses on several sociolinguistic aspects, such as linguistic background, intergenerational language transmission, attitudes toward Romani, issues of identity and language maintenance, as well as various domains of language usage. Although characterized by many similarities—particularly in their linguistic backgrounds and attitudes toward language—the two communities differ in the frequency of Romani language usage across different domains. Notably, significantly more Arli Roma use their language when speaking to their partners, children, and neighbours, discussing topics of social interest, and, most importantly, during prayer and in gravestone inscriptions. In contrast, Sremski Roma report more frequent usage of Serbian across various domains, pointing to the potential vulnerability of Romani in this community. These findings indicate that assessments of language vulnerability and endangerment of Romani varieties should take into account dialectal diversity and various extralinguistic factors, providing separate estimates for distinct varieties.

Keywords: Sremski Romani, Arli Romani, language vulnerability, Serbia, sociolinguistic questionnaire

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1. Introduction

The Roma settlement in the northwestern Belgrade suburb of Batajnica has existed for over a century, consisting mainly of members of the Sremski Roma community for decades. Between the 1960s and 1990s, the former Yugoslavia experienced migrations of Roma (and other nationalities) throughout the country, significantly affecting its ethnic diversity (Hammel, Mason & Stevanović 2007).[1] During this period, many Arli Roma families from the southern parts of Serbia migrated to Batajnica, and their migrations continue to the present day. According to the 2022 Census, a total of 1,224 Roma reside in Batajnica, constituting 3.6% of the population in this settlement.[2]

Administratively, the settlement of Batajnica belonged to the Srem region in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina until 1955, when it became part of the Belgrade District (*Beogradski srez*) together with other settlements from the Zemun District (*Zemunski srez*) (Tasić et al. 1995). Currently, Batajnica is one of the settlements in the Municipality of Zemun in the capital city of Belgrade.

The research presented in this chapter deals with the sociolinguistic situation of the Sremski Roma and Arli Roma communities residing in Batajnica. Both communities inhabit the same neighbourhood where mainly Roma people live, located in the northern part of Batajnica. These communities belong to different religious denominations (Orthodox Christian and Muslim, respectively) and speak two different Romani varieties: Sremski Romani (a Gurbet-like variety, Southern Vlax group of Romani dialects) and Arli Romani (Balkan group of Romani dialects).

The research draws upon the results of the sociolinguistic *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* developed under the project "Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia" (see the Introduction in this volume) and applied during fieldwork in the Roma settlement in Batajnica in 2023.

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[1] In the same period, numerous Roma also left the country due to socio-economic reasons (starting from the late 1960s), political crises (during the 1980s) and wars (in the 1990s) (Lapov, Reyniers & Davy 2008, focusing on the migrations of Gurbet Roma).

[2] According to the same census, the overall number of Roma in Serbia is 131,936 (1.98% of the total population), while the number of citizens who identify Romani as their mother tongue is 79,687. The census does not specify the particular Roma community to which Roma belong or the Romani dialect they speak.

In addition to the questionnaire responses, the study also incorporates information provided by respondents during interviews and the author's observations of the community during fieldwork based on conversations with respondents and other Roma in the settlement.

The study aims to explore similarities and differences between the two Roma communities in various sociolinguistic aspects. It is centred on the connection between language, religious practices, and in-group identity, as well as between-group relations and assimilation, pointing out possible consequences for the vulnerability of the two investigated Romani varieties.[3]

The chapter is organised as follows: the remainder of the Introduction looks at international assessments of the endangerment of Romani and provides information on the communities of Sremski Roma and Arli Roma based on fieldwork and selected previous research. The Methodology section describes the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* and the sample for this study. Next, the chapter presents the results of the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, organised across subsections that cover the respondents' linguistic backgrounds, their attitudes toward Romani, and various domains of language usage. The Discussion section summarizes the findings, focusing on comparisons between the two communities and pointing out relevant factors that might affect the vulnerability of Romani. The concluding remarks address the limitations of the study and outline future research directions.

1.1. Estimates of Romani endangerment

The assessment of the endangerment levels of Romani in Serbia can be found in several international databases of endangered languages, though with differing estimates. The current online version of the UNESCO *World Atlas of Languages*[4] registers Romani as a minority language spoken in Serbia, rating it as "potentially vulnerable". However, in the earlier version of the

[3] In this chapter, the term "vulnerability" is considered context-dependent, pertaining exclusively to the two Romani varieties under study. The chapter does not aim to establish vulnerability levels based on the most commonly used scales (e.g. Fishman 1991, Brenzinger et al. 2003, Krauss 2008, Lewis & Simons 2010) nor to compare the two varieties to other Romani varieties spoken elsewhere in Serbia or beyond. For more details on the instrument used in the study and its possible applications, see Mirić et al. in this volume.

[4] The beta version of the UNESCO *Atlas* across countries is available at: https://en.wal.unesco.org/#countries and across languages at: https://en.wal.unesco.org/#languages. Accessed September 19, 2024.

UNESCO *Atlas of World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010), Romani was classified as "definitely endangered". This indicates a change in its status over the years, although the specific criteria for this change are not explained in the database. The *Endangered Languages Project* (ELP) lists several Romani varieties in Serbia: Balkan Romani, Baltic Romani, Carpathian Romani, Sinte Romani, and Vlax Romani (see Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020 for details).[5] However, the ELP incorrectly places Carpathian and Baltic Romani in Serbia, while the currently available interactive map features only one variety—Balkan Romani—located in the territory of Kosovo and classified as being "at risk".[6] Several Romani varieties are also mentioned in the 27th edition of the *Ethnologue* (2024)[7]: Balkan Romani, Romano-Serbian, and Sinte Romani, all classified as "stable". Although the Romano-Serbian variety is mentioned by some Roma groups in Serbia (see Section 1.2), it is not included in any relevant linguistic classifications of Romani varieties (see Matras 2002, Elšík & Beníšek 2020).

In addition to differing estimates of Romani endangerment, ranging from "stable" to "potentially vulnerable" and "at risk", the existing databases provide insufficient or inaccurate information on Romani and other minority languages in Serbia (Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020). The data about the information sources are particularly scarce. The existing databases also have other issues, some related to the Romani language. Firstly, the UNESCO criteria are applied to Romani as a whole, while as a dispersed language, its vitality should be assessed for each individual dialect (Halwachs 2020: 432). Furthermore, Leggio and Matras (2017: 257) emphasise that those databases "assume that a language must conform to the model of the nation-state and thus function in all possible domains through a standard", which is clearly inapplicable to Romani dialects. Using the example of several Roma communities in Serbia, Mirić (2022) pointed out the need to assess the endangerment of Romani varieties based on the status of individual dialects and specific Roma communities. This involves analysing several factors contributing to language vulnerability, including the geographic area where the language is spoken, the type of community

[5] Available at: https://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/country/Serbia. Accessed September 19, 2024.

[6] Available at: https://www.endangeredlanguages.com/#/4/43.300/-2.104/0/100000/0/low/mid/high/unknown. Accessed September 19, 2024.

[7] Available at: https://www.ethnologue.com/country/RS/. Accessed September 19, 2024.

(multilingual or not), neighbourhood (Roma or not), and marital patterns (in-group or not).

Considering the dialectal diversity and geographical dispersion of Romani, this study aims to examine the sociolinguistic dynamics of two distinct Romani varieties spoken in the same location.

1.2. The distinction between Sremski Roma and Arli Roma

During fieldwork in the Roma settlement in Batajnica, two criteria were used to determine the Roma group to which the respondents belong.

First, they were asked about the denomination of their group and the name of their dialect. Based on their responses, they were classified as either Sremski Roma or Arli Roma. Respondents classified as Sremski Roma provided the following autonyms: *pravoslavni Romi* "Orthodox Roma", *srpski Romi* "Serbian Roma", *sremski Romi* "Sremski Roma", and *Romi* "Roma". They referred to their dialect as *srpski romski* "Serbian Romani", *sremski romski* "Sremski Romani" or *romski* "Romani". One respondent also mentioned the terms *gurbetski Rom* "Gurbet Rom" and *gurbetski sremački romski* "Gurbet Sremski Romani". However, other respondents in this group find the term *Gurbet* offensive because it is an exonym used only by "the local Muslim Roma". Respondents classified as Arli Roma provided the following autonyms: *muslimanski Romi* "Muslim Roma", *Arlije* "Arli", or *Romi* "Roma". They referred to their dialect as *arlijski romski* "Arli Romani" or *romski* "Romani". In addition to using the terms *Romi* and *romski*, some respondents in both groups occasionally employed the terms *Cigani* "Gypsies" and *ciganski* "Gypsy", while others, in turn, found it offensive.[8]

Second, respondents were asked to provide the words they use for "bread" and "water" and translate sentences containing the verb "to be" in the present and past tenses: "I am a Roma man/woman" and "I was a good child". Respondents identifying as Sremski Roma used the words *man(g)rro* "bread" and *paj* "water" and translated the sentences as *Me sem Rrom* "I am a Roma man"/ *Me sem Rromni* "I am a Roma woman", *Me sema(s) lačho čhavo* "I was a good child/boy"/ *Me sema(s) lačhi čhor(r)i* "I was a good girl". Respondents identifying as Arli Roma used *mar(r)o* for "bread" and *pani* for "water" and translated the sentences as *Me (h)ijum*[9] *Rrom* "I am a Roma

[8] For more details on Romani self-appellations, see Matras 2019 and Piasere 2019.

[9] A few respondents used the form *sijum* instead of *(h)ijum*.

man" / *Me (h)ijum Rromni* "I am a Roma woman", *Me (h)ijumlje šužo čhavo* "I was a good child/boy"/ *Me (h)ijumlje šuži*[10] *čhaj*. An additional distinction was observed between the two groups when the respondents filled out the questionnaire. When asked what they call their language in Romani, Sremski Roma sometimes responded with *dau svato rromane* "I speak Romani", while Arli Roma answered *vaćerava rromane* "I speak Romani", employing a different verb or construction. The linguistic distinctions between the two varieties are beyond the scope of this chapter and serve only for classification purposes.

Regarding their family history, the Sremski Roma respondents and their ancestors have lived in Batajnica for a long time. Some members of the community mentioned that their families had lived in Batajnica for over 100 years and certainly before World War II.[11] Many respondents often emphasised in the interviews that the composer of the Romani anthem *Djelem, djelem*, Žarko Jovanović Jagdino, was born in Batajnica in 1925, and many of the Sremski Roma who still live in the settlement are his relatives. In addition, several members of the community migrated to Batajnica from towns or villages in the Srem region of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, such as Krčedin, Stara Pazova, Stari Banovci, Šimanovci, Vojka, and also from Titel (in the Bačka region of Vojvodina), primarily due to marriage.

In contrast, the majority of the Arli Roma respondents or their ancestors migrated to Batajnica from southern Serbia, particularly from towns like Bujanovac, Vladičin Han, and Vranje, or from the North-Macedonian town of Kumanovo. Their migrations began in the 1970s and continue to this day. The principal reasons behind the migrations of the respondents and their families were job opportunities or joining family

[10] A few respondents used the adjective *šukar* instead of *šužo* (M.SG) and *šuži* (F.SG). Both adjectives mean "beautiful".

[11] The region of Srem (including Batajnica, which was in Srem until 1955) was particularly affected by WWII (see Maluckov 1979, among others). In 1942, nearly all Roma from Srem were deported to the Jasenovac camp, resulting in the deportation and murder of approximately 8,000 individuals, according to the Provincial Commission for the Establishment of Crimes in Vojvodina (*Pokrajinska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača u Vojvodini*), as cited in the Archive of Vojvodina, the project "Victims in Srem 1941–1945". The online browsable database also contains the names of genocide victims, some of whom were Roma from Batajnica. Available at: https://sremskezrtve.arhivvojvodine.org.rs/. Accessed September 23, 2024.

members who had previously migrated to the settlement in search of work (see Mikulić 1985 for details on labour mobility in Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1981, especially on migration from southern Serbian towns). Additionally, one of the respondents migrated with his family from Priština in 1999 during the NATO bombing of Kosovo and Metohija.[12] Recently, some Arli Roma respondents moved to Batajnica from nearby places such as Zemun or Surčin, which also have large Arli Roma communities. They migrated to Batajnica due to marriage.

The fieldwork in the two communities additionally revealed that Sremski Roma and Arli Roma rarely communicate with each other, not only because of their dialect differences—since they can all communicate in Serbian—but mainly due to their religious differences and the fact that they settled in the area at different times. According to the respondents, they maintain relationships primarily within their own Roma communities, especially within their families, while also interacting with the majority Serbian population due to work and education. In the interviews, Sremski Roma often emphasised their long-standing friendly ties with their Serbian neighbours, as some live in the same streets as local Serbs.

1.3. Selected documentation on Sremski Romani and Arli Romani in Serbia

The linguistic literature on the Sremski Romani and Arli Romani varieties spoken in Serbia is scarce, both in terms of language endangerment and grammatical descriptions or the mapping of the places where these varieties are spoken. However, the two Romani varieties under study are included in several relevant international databases.

The Phonogram Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences contains an extensive collection of recordings in Romani by linguist Mozes Heinschink, encompassing a wide variety of content, including songs, fairy

[12] Numerous Roma families had to flee during the NATO bombing, and many are nowadays dispersed throughout Serbia. Some live in the substandard settlement of Bežanijska kosa in Belgrade. As the fieldwork done in 2022 revealed, this settlement encompasses different Roma groups, namely, Čergaši, Kovači, Muslim Roma, in addition to Ashkali (Aškalije) and Albanians. The majority of these groups were displaced from Kosovo and Metohija in 1998/1999 (Mirić 2022). See also Raduški (2002) on the ethnic migrations of internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija to Vojvodina in the 1990s.

tales, and narratives on various topics.[13] Regarding the Sremski Roma in Serbia, the collection includes 22 recordings in Romani featuring members of this group.[14] Made primarily in Vienna, these recordings feature speakers who migrated to Austria from various locations in the Srem region, including the village of Vojka and the towns of Stara Pazova and Ruma. The recordings were made in the 1960s and 1990s, mainly in Romani and often in Serbo-Croatian. Regarding the Arli Roma, the collection contains over 300 recordings of Romani speakers from North Macedonia and Serbia.[15] The recordings were made in various locations in Serbia, primarily in the southern and south-eastern regions, such as the towns of Vranjska Banja, Bujanovac, Niš, and Leskovac, as well as in central Serbia, including the towns of Jagodina and Kruševac. Most Arli recordings feature speakers from Priština and Prizren in Kosovo, recorded either in those towns or in Vienna after their migration. Most recordings were made during the 1960s, with some extending into the 1990s. Only a few recordings were made with Arli Roma from Belgrade and Novi Sad. It is noteworthy that the places of origin of both Sremski Roma and Arli Roma represented in Mozes Heinschink's collection correspond to the locations of these groups mentioned by the respondents in this study.

The ROMLEX lexical database includes the vocabulary of "Sremski Gurbet Romani", classified as a Southern Vlax Romani variety spoken in Vojvodina.[16] It contains a total of 2,660 lemmas, with translations in English, German, and Serbian. As for Arli Romani, the database includes the vocabulary of "Macedonian Arli Romani" and "Kosovo Arli Romani", with the latter comprising 2,705 lemmas and translations in Albanian, English, German, and Serbian. These Arli varieties are well-documented in the work of Norbert Boretzky and Victor Friedman (see Boretzky 1996, Friedman 1999, 2017).

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[13] Available at: http://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/ui/miha/sessions.php?sortieren=&action=auskunft&von=projekte&id_projekte=1&vonBis=0-9&suchbegriff=projekt-id&suchwert=1. Accessed September 23, 2024.

[14] Available at: https://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/sessions.php?action=auskunft&von=ethnien&suchbegriff=ethnien-ethnie-id&suchwert=14&id_ethnien=14. Accessed September 23, 2024.

[15] Available at: https://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/sessions.php?action=auskunft&von=ethnien&suchbegriff=ethnien-ethnie-id&suchwert=2&id_ethnien=2. Accessed September 23, 2024.

[16] Available at: http://romani.uni-graz.at/romlex/. Accessed September 23, 2004.

The Romani Morpho-Syntax Database (RMS), based on questionnaires collecting comparable grammatical features of Romani dialects, contains data from several Vlax and Balkan varieties spoken in the former Yugoslavia.[17] As for the Vlax group of dialects, the RMS includes the Gurbet variety in the villages of Deronje (Bačka, Vojvodina) and Aleksandrovo (Banat, Vojvodina), and the town of Budva (Montenegro), the Kalderaš variety in the town of Šid (Srem, Vojvodina), and the Lovari variety in the village of Debeljača (Banat). As for the Balkan group of dialects, these include Arli and Bugurdži Arli in the town of Beočin (Bačka), Arli in the town of Zrenjanin (Banat), Kosovan Arli in the town of Gnjilane (Kosovo and Metohija), and Kosovan in Prizren (Kosovo and Metohija). The RMS also includes data from the varieties named "Bačkačjke" in the village of Čurug (Bačka, Vojvodina), "Čhurjarja" (Žabljak, Montenegro), and "Katolikurja" (Novi Bečej, Banat). Although not specified in the database, the available transcripts indicate that these are Vlax varieties. Despite the range of the dialects presented in the RMS, the data from Sremski Romani are lacking.

Invaluable ethnographic information on the Roma in Srem is provided in Maluckov (1979). The research was conducted in the 1960s and 1970s in the following locations in Srem: Adaševci, Belegiš, Bosut, Čerević, Donji Tovarnik, Golubinci, Grgurevci, Irig, Kuzmin, Laćarak, Martinci, Morović, Ruma, Sremski Karlovci, and Stari Banovci. Although the settlement of Batajnica was not included in the research, the publication included data on the Roma who migrated from Batajnica to other villages in Srem. Notably, the author provided information on whether specific Roma communities spoke Romani at the time, as well as which other languages they spoke. This information is particularly relevant in terms of language vulnerability.

2. Methodology: instrument and sample

2.1. Instrument: *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*

This study is based on the responses to the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*, which was developed to assess the levels of language vulnerability/endangerment in several minority communities in Serbia, including Romani (for details about the questionnaire, see Mirić et al. in this volume). The questionnaire is divided into 16 sections, comprising 151 questions

[17] Available at: https://romani.dch.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/. Accessed September 23, 2024.

(predominantly closed-ended questions, with a few open-ended questions). For the purpose of this chapter, selected questions from the questionnaire are analysed to establish the main sociolinguistic similarities and points of divergence between the two Roma communities in Batajnica. Although the questionnaire was administered in Serbian, some parts of the interviews were conducted in Romani, particularly at the beginning of the interviews, to determine to which Roma groups the respondents belonged and which Romani dialects they spoke.

The data were audio-recorded and stored in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, in the dedicated VLingS Archive. The responses were entered into the database created in the SPSS program.

2.2. Sample

The questionnaire was administered by researchers or language consultants in 2023 to 290 respondents in the following Roma communities in Serbia: the towns of Kikinda (northern Serbia), Knjaževac (eastern Serbia), Kragujevac (central Serbia), and Pirot (southern Serbia) and two suburban settlements in the capital city of Belgrade: Orlovsko naselje (Mirijevo) and Batajnica. This chapter focuses solely on the responses from the Belgrade suburban settlement of Batajnica, which were collected in the summer of 2023 by the author.

Thirty-five respondents from Batajnica participated in the study (see Table 1 for demographic details). All respondents signed an informed consent form before the interviews, in which they were informed about the goals of the study, participating institutions, data anonymisation procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study.

The uneven distribution across gender, age, and education level stems from the unavailability or reluctance of potential respondents in different categories. Therefore, it is impossible to conduct a statistical analysis across these demographic categories.

It is noteworthy that the majority of respondents completed elementary school or have lower levels of education (see Table 1), which aligns with the figures provided by the 2022 Census showing that only approximately 20% of Roma in Serbia have education higher than primary school.

		Roma group	
		Sremski Roma	Arli Roma
Gender	Male	11	6
	Female	7	11
Age range	18–29	3	7
	30–44	6	3
	45–59	8	4
	60+	1	3
Religion	Orthodox Christian	16	/
	Muslim	1	17
	Other	1	/
Education level	Without schooling	1	5
	Unfinished elementary school	3	3
	Elementary school	9	8
	Three-year vocational school	3	1
	Higher vocational school	1	/
	Other (evening school)	1	/

Table 1: Respondents' demographic information.

Given the relatively small number of participants, this study can be considered a pilot aimed at identifying several factors that may influence language vulnerability. As the statistical analyses in the next section will demonstrate, the number of respondents is adequate for observing various similarities and differences between the two communities involved in the study.

3. Analysis

Aiming to compare Sremski Roma and Arli Roma regarding various sociolinguistic aspects, the analysis of the responses to the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* is organised across linguistic background, language attitudes, and informal and formal domains of language usage.

3.1. Linguistic background

In the first two sections of the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* dedicated to language usage (I), language acquisition and intergenerational language transmission (II), the following questions were quantitatively analysed:[18]

I_2 Which language(s) do you use?

I_5 What is/are your mother tongue(s)?

I_7 What was the first language you acquired as a child?

I_8 Which language/languages do you use most frequently today?

I_10 If you have a partner, in which language do you communicate with each other?

I_11 Did the people with whom you spent the most time in your childhood speak Romani?

II_1 When did you start learning Romani?

II_2 If you learned Romani, from whom did you learn it the most?

II_5 If you have children, do they speak Romani?

II_6 If you have children, in which language do you communicate with them?

The quantitative analysis of responses indicates various similarities between the Sremski Roma (SR) and Arli Roma (AR) communities in their linguistic backgrounds. In these domains, the statistical analyses in the SPSS program using the Chi-square test (for questions I_2, I_5, I_7, I_8, I_10, II_2, II_6) or the One-Way ANOVA (for questions I_11, II_1, II_5) did not indicate any significant differences between the two communities. All results of statistical analyses are provided in the Appendix.[19]

The majority of interviewees in both communities are at least bilingual in Romani and Serbian (SR: 94.5%, AR: 100%). Only one respondent (SR) does not use Romani at all and speaks only Serbian.[20] Respondents in both groups identified Romani as their mother tongue (SR: 88.9%, AR: 94.1%), either as the only mother tongue or alongside Serbian. Additionally, two respondents stated only Serbian as their mother tongue (SR), while one

[18] The Roman numerals in front of the questions indicate the number of the section (I, II, III…), and the Arabic numerals mark the ordinal number of the question (1, 2, 3…) in the questionnaire (see Mirić et al. in this volume).

[19] The Appendix is available in the OSF repository: https://osf.io/63fk9/?view_only=fcf1532293a14c54b2a577813517d22d. Accessed November 23, 2024.

[20] The respondent in question is a Roma who grew up with Romani-speaking parents who did not transmit Romani to their children. Although married to another Romani-speaking person, they also do not pass on the language to their children. Given that the study explores language vulnerability, it was relevant that the respondents belonged to the Roma community, rather than whether they actually spoke Romani or at which level of proficiency.

respondent mentioned Albanian (AR). Romani is also overwhelmingly mentioned as the respondents' first language (SR: 88.9%, AR: 94.1%), either as their only first language or in addition to Serbian. Serbian is listed as the first language of two Sremski Roma respondents and one Arli Roma respondent.

Another similarity is observed between the two groups: the vast majority of respondents acquired Romani in their early childhood, before the age of 7 (SR: 94.4%, AR: 94.1%). One respondent learned it in childhood, after the age of 7 (SR), and one person as an adult (AR). Respondents mainly acquired the language from their parents or grandparents (SR: 100%, AR: 88.3%), and the persons they grew up with spoke Romani fluently (SR: 100%, AR: 94.1%). The only respondent who did not grow up with speakers of Romani is the same person whose first language is Albanian. This person learned Romani due to marriage and now speaks it fluently, uses it when communicating with her partner and children (alongside Serbian), and employs it frequently (alongside Serbian). Given that this person actively uses Romani and transmits it to children, she significantly contributes to the vitality of Romani.

As for language transmission to younger generations of speakers, the respondents who have children (SR: 15, AR: 12) transmit the language to them, and their children mostly speak Romani fluently. In the group of Sremski Roma, 73.3% of respondents said that their children speak Romani fluently, 13.3% reported that they can use simple sentences, and 13.3% stated that their children do not speak the language at all. In the group of Arli Roma, 83.3% of respondents said that their children speak Romani fluently, 8.3% reported that their children can use simple sentences, and 8.3% said that they can use some words. When communicating with their children, Sremski Roma mostly use Romani and Serbian (57.1%), only Romani (28.6%) or only Serbian (14.3%), whereas Arli Roma use Romani and Serbian (50%) or only Romani (41.7%). Although these differences between the two communities were statistically insignificant, the findings suggest that Romani is more frequently used by Arli Roma to communicate with children and that, according to the respondents, their children mainly speak Romani fluently.[21] Overall, the results indicate uninterrupted language transmission in both communities.

[21] One possible reason why this statistical analysis did not reveal significant differences could be the number of cells with an expected count of less than 5, as reported by the program. This issue arises from the low number of responses for some of the given answers.

When asked which language(s) they use most frequently, respondents provided the following answers: Romani and Serbian (SR: 58.8%, AR: 41.2%), Romani (SR: 11.8%, AR: 41.2%), Serbian (SR: 29.4%, AR: 17.6%). This distribution indicates that the majority of respondents most frequently use Romani in their communication, either only Romani or alongside Serbian. Although the statistical analysis did not show any significant differences, the two communities differ slightly, especially in the number of people who employ only Romani most frequently, as the percentage is higher for Arli Roma (41.2%).[22]

Out of 32 respondents who have a partner (16 in each group), the majority of them employ Romani in their communication, either as the only language or in addition to Serbian (and sometimes another language) (SR: 75%, AR: 93.8%). However, 25% of the Sremski Roma respondents and 6.3% of the Arli Roma respondents communicate with their partner exclusively in Serbian. These differences were not statistically significant, but the percentages could indicate that Sremski Roma use Romani less frequently with their partners than Arli Roma.[23]

3.2. Attitudes towards language

In the sections of the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* dedicated to the feelings and attitudes towards one's own language (XII), issues of language and identity (XIII), and language maintenance (XIV), the following questions were quantitatively analysed:

XII_1 How do you feel when you speak Romani in the presence of other speakers?

XII_2 How do you feel when you speak Romani in the presence of Serbian speakers?

XIII_1 Do you think Romani is important?

XIII_2 Does Romani represent the Roma community and the culture of the Roma community?

XIV_4 Is it important to you to preserve/revitalise (or learn) Romani?

XIV_6 Is it important to you that Romani is passed on to younger generations?

XIV_8 Is Romani disappearing?

The analysis mainly reveals similarities between Sremski Roma and Arli Roma in their attitudes towards Romani. The results of the statistical

[22] See Footnote 21.

[23] See Footnote 21.

analyses using the Chi-square test in the SPSS program are provided in the Appendix, while only significant results are mentioned below.

First, the similarities are reflected in the fact that members of both communities find Romani to be important to them (SR: 94.4%, AR: 93.8%), an important marker of their identity (SR: 100%, AR: 93.8%), extremely important to preserve (SR: 88.9%, AR: 100%), and important to transmit to younger generations of speakers (SR: 94.4%, AR: 94.1%).

Second, both communities maintain positive or neutral feelings toward the language when speaking Romani to other Romani speakers. More precisely, respondents provided the following answers on their feelings: "I feel proud" (SR: 12.5%, AR: 17.6%), "I feel comfortable" (SR: 37.5%, AR: 23.5%), "I feel as usual" (SR: 37.5%, AR: 41.2%), "I don't know, I don't think about it" (SR: 12.5%, AR: 17.6%). However, when speaking Romani in front of Serbian speakers, some members of both communities manifest negative feelings. In addition to responding "I feel comfortable" (SR: 20%, AR: 18.8%), "I feel as usual" (SR: 33.3%, AR: 31.3%), and "I don't know, I don't think about it" (SR: 13.3%, AR: 6.3%), they also replied with "I feel uncomfortable" (SR: 33.3%, AR: 43.8%), which could be a consequence of the discrimination of Roma (see Bašić & Stjelja 2021 and Jakšić 2002, among others).

The only significant difference between the communities is observed concerning the respondents' answer to the question of whether their language is disappearing. Namely, more Sremski Roma than Arli Roma think that their language is disappearing (SR: 77.8%, AR: 23.5%) ($\chi 2$ (2, n = 35) = 13.014, p < .001).[24]

3.3. Domains of language usage

In the section of the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* on the domains of language usage (III), the following questions were quantitatively analysed:

III_1 How often do you use Romani in conversations with the following persons or in the following situations? (1_Family members, 2_Friends, 3_Neighbours, 4_Colleagues, 5_ Members of the clergy, 6_ Public officials)

III_2 Do you use Romani as a "secret language" when you don't want others to understand you?

III_4 Do you listen to music in Romani?

[24] Given that the program reported 2 cells with an expected count of less than 5, these results should be taken cautiously.

III_5 In which language do you more frequently discuss private topics?
III_6 In which language do you more frequently discuss social topics?
III_7 In which language do you think?
III_8 In which language do you count (to yourself)?
III_9 In which language do you pray?
III_10 In which language do you dream?

The analysis reveals similarities and differences between the Sremski Roma and Arli Roma regarding language domains. The statistical analyses in the SPSS program are based on the Chi-square test for all questions in this section, except for III_1, which is based on the One-Way ANOVA. Only statistically significant differences are given below, while all other results are provided in the Appendix.

In examining language use across different situations and persons (III_1), both communities exhibit strikingly similar trends in nearly all domains. Respondents were asked to rate their frequency of using Romani, with the options subsequently coded from 5 to 1: "always" – 5, "often" – 4, "sometimes" – 3, "rarely" – 2, and "never" – 1. As shown in Table 2, the mean scores reflect these patterns. Both communities employ Romani when communicating with family members (SR: 4.0, AR: 4.53), friends (SR: 3.67, AR: 4.00), and colleagues (SR: 1.75, AR: 2.45), as well as members of the clergy (SR: 1.39, AR: 1.56). However, as shown by different mean scores, a distinction arises between informal and formal contexts in both communities. Romani is predominantly used in informal settings—specifically with family and friends—while its usage diminishes in formal interactions with colleagues and clergy. Notably, there is a complete absence of Romani communication with officials in public institutions, e.g. municipalities, local community offices, post offices, and police stations, as indicated by the mean score of 1.00 "never" in both communities (see Table 2).

Conversely, significant differences emerge between the two communities regarding communication with neighbours (see Table 2), with Arli Roma using Romani more frequently than Sremski Roma ($F(1, 34) = 18.824$, $p < .01$). This disparity may stem from the fact that Arli Roma predominantly reside in neighbourhoods with other Arli Roma families or occasional members of the Sremski Roma community, with whom they have limited interactions, as noted by some respondents. In contrast, many Sremski Roma live alongside the Serbian-speaking majority and

often emphasise their friendly relationships with their Serbian neighbours. Additionally, as Orthodox Christians, Sremski Roma attend the same church as the Serbian community, located in the centre of the settlement of Batajnica. Given their longer coexistence with the Serbian population and shared experiences, such as attending the same elementary schools for generations, these findings are not unexpected.

		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
III_1_1 Family	SR	18	4.00	1.138	.268
	AR	17	4.53	.874	.212
III_1_2 Friends	SR	18	3.67	1.188	.280
	AR	17	4.00	1.225	.297
III_1_3 Neighbours	SR	18	2.56	1.617	.381
	AR	16	4.50	.816	.204
III_1_4 Colleagues	SR	16	1.75	1.390	.348
	AR	11	2.45	1.214	.366
III_1_5 Clergy	SR	18	1.39	.778	.183
	AR	16	1.56	1.094	.273
III_1_6 Officials	SR	18	1.00	.000	.000
	AR	17	1.00	.000	.000

Table 2: Mean scores of frequencies of Romani language usage in the Sremski Roma and Arli Roma communities.

Further, when asked if they use Romani as a secret language (III_2), some members of both communities gave affirmative answers (SR: 27.8%, AR: 52.9%), mentioning various situations in which this happens: when they are on the bus and do not want people to understand them, when they discuss something embarrassing, when they are in "awkward" situations, when they engage in gossip, or when they are at work and the doctor's. Although not statistically significant, the percentage of respondents who use Romani as a secret language is higher for Arli Roma, which might reflect their stronger use of Romani within the community.

In both communities, almost all respondents listen to music in Romani (III_4) (SR: 94.4%, AR: 100%). Members of the Sremski Roma community particularly emphasise that music is an important element of their culture and mention several Roma musicians from Batajnica. One of them is the aforementioned composer of the Roma anthem, Žarko Jovanović Jagdino,

who played the string instrument balalaika and was a world-renowned musician.[25] The study by Petrović and Miltojević (2020) also showed that music is one of the most important determinants of the identity of the Roma community in Serbia.

As for conversation topics, when discussing private topics, such as family, health, or daily life (III_5), more respondents employ Romani than Serbian in both communities: Romani (SR: 77.8%, AR: 91.7%), Serbian (SR: 22.2%, AR: 8.3%).[26] However, a significant difference between the two groups emerges when it comes to topics of social interest, such as politics or their village/city (III_6). Arli Roma demonstrate a higher frequency of Romani use compared to Sremski Roma when discussing social topics ($\chi 2$ (1, n = 22) = 6.712, $p < .05$): Romani (SR: 8.3%, AR: 60%), Serbian (SR: 91.7%, AR: 40%).[27]

In using Romani for non-communicative purposes, i.e. inner speech, such as thinking (III_7), counting (III_8), praying (III_9) or dreaming (III_10), there are several notable findings. The differences observed between the Sremski Roma and Arli Roma in using Romani or Serbian are not significant when it comes to the language employed for counting (Romani: SR: 40%, AR: 25%, Serbian: SR: 60%, AR: 75%) and dreaming (Romani: SR: 44.4%, AR: 77.8%, Serbian: SR: 55.6%, AR: 22.2%), although the percentages indicate that more Arli Roma use Romani for these purposes. However, the difference between the communities is marginally significant when it comes to thinking, as more Arli Roma than Sremski Roma employ Romani when thinking ($\chi 2$ (1, n = 22) = 4.023, $p = .059$): Romani (SR: 50%, AR: 90%), Serbian (SR: 50%, AR: 10%).[28] Notably, significantly more Arli

[25] Žarko Jovanović Jagdino was born in Batajnica in 1925. During World War II, he was deported to three concentration camps and lost most of his family members. From 1964 until his death in 1985, Jagdino lived in Paris, France. He participated in the first two World Roma Congresses: in London in 1971, when the song *Djelem, djelem* was adopted as the Roma anthem, and in Geneva in 1978, when he was elected the Romani Minister of Culture. An interview with him in Serbo-Croatian, published in an online journal in 1984, is available at: https://www.tambura.com.hr/No2/jagdino.html. Accessed September 23, 2024.

[26] This analysis excluded the answers "Equally frequently in Romani and in Serbian" and 'I don't know".

[27] This analysis excluded the answers "Equally frequently in Romani and in Serbian" and "I don't know".

[28] This analysis excluded the answers "In both my language and Serbian", "In some other language", and "I don't know".

Roma use Romani during prayer ($\chi 2$ (1, n = 28) = 7.026, $p < .05$), unlike Sremski Roma, who employ Serbian more frequently: Romani (SR: 28.6%, AR: 78.6%), Serbian (SR: 71.4%, AR: 21.4%). These differences suggest that Arli Roma in Batajnica use Romani more frequently in personal reflections, particularly during prayer. This observation aligns with the fact that Sremski Roma attend the liturgy in the Serbian Orthodox Church with the Serbian-speaking majority and communicate with their priests in Serbian (also see next section).[29]

3.4. Romani in the linguistic landscape, religious service and cultural manifestations

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the language domains presented in the section above, several observations can be drawn from the responses regarding Romani language usage in the linguistic landscape (VI), religious service (IX), and cultural manifestations (X). The results of the statistical analysis are given in the Appendix.[30] The following questions in the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* were taken into account:

VI_3 Are there official signs in your language on/inside buildings of state institutions (health centres, municipalities, schools, etc.) or street names and names of places?

VI_4 If yes, what kind of signs and on what kind of buildings have you seen them?

VI_5 Have you ever seen any signs in Romani (e.g. inscriptions on monuments, gravestones, graffiti)?

VI_6 If yes, what kind of signs and where have you seen them?

IX_1 Does religious service or any of its parts exist in Romani in Serbia?

IX_2 Have you ever attended a religious service (or sermon) in Romani in Serbia? If yes, indicate when and where.

X_3 Have you ever attended any cultural events dedicated to the Roma community in Serbia (e.g. music festivals, gatherings, folklore events)?

X_4 If yes, what types of events have you attended?

X_5 Are there associations or cultural centres in Serbia where you have access to Romani culture and language?

The analysis indicates a significant absence of Romani in the linguistic landscape of Serbia, as the majority of respondents from both communities

[29] The liturgy in the Serbian Orthodox Church is conducted in Church Slavonic (Bajić 2007).

[30] The statistical analysis did not include open-ended questions VI_4, VI_6, X_4.

reported not having seen any official signage in Romani in or on buildings of state institutions (SR: 100%, AR: 88.2%). While one Arli respondent indicated uncertainty, answering "I don't know", another mentioned the existence of such signs but did not specify their location or type.

Regarding other forms of Romani signage, such as inscriptions on monuments or gravestones, significantly more members of the Arli Roma community reported having seen them ($\chi 2$ (2, n = 35) = 3.957, $p < .05$) (SR: 27.8%, AR: 58.8%). Specifically, three members of the Sremski Roma community noted signs like graffiti (e.g. *mangav tut* "I love you"), and two gave information regarding who erected certain gravestones at the cemetery.[31] In contrast, as many as ten members of the Arli community reported encountering inscriptions on gravestones, typically *vazdena o spomenik* "This gravestone was erected by". They frequently referenced Muslim gravestones located in cemeteries in Bežanijska kosa, Sremčica, Zbeg in Borča (all in Belgrade), as well as in southern Serbian towns like Vranje and Bujanovac. Some of the Arli Roma respondents also reported that Romani inscriptions appear on the gravestones of some of their family members.[32]

Overall, the findings suggest that Arli Roma are more likely to encounter inscriptions on monuments, probably due to their Muslim heritage, which influences the style of their gravestones. Conversely, Sremski Roma noted that the Orthodox Christian gravestones of Roma resemble those of the Serbian population and are typically inscribed in Serbian.

Regarding the presence of Romani in religious services, while the results are not statistically significant, they indicate that some members of both communities are aware of religious services conducted in Romani (SR: 27.8%, AR: 41.2%). However, there are also members of both communities who have not heard of such services (SR: 22.2%, AR: 35.3%). Notably, more Arli Roma than Sremski Roma have attended such services (SR: 5.9%, AR: 23.5%). When asked about the specific locations, most Arli Roma respondents reported that religious services are held in mosques. A few specified that these mosques are in the town of Bujanovac (southern Serbia), and one respondent mentioned a mosque in Batajnica that held services in

[31] The two respondents mentioned that these gravestones are located in the local cemetery in Batajnica; however, the author of this chapter was unable to locate them there.

[32] For more details on the Romani language in the linguistic landscape in Serbia, including references to Romani inscriptions on gravestones in the cemetery Zbeg, in a Belgrade suburb, see Ćirković 2023.

Romani during Ramadan. Further interviews and the author's field research revealed that there is a house in the Roma settlement in Batajnica that serves as a mosque and is officially recognized by the Muslim Community in Serbia, with an inscription on the gate stating *Islamska zajednica Srbije* "The Muslim Community of Serbia". However, the majority of Arli Roma respondents claimed that the imams who worked there did not speak Romani and were not members of the Roma community.

As for cultural events, a statistically significant difference emerged between the two communities, indicating that more Sremski Roma than Arli Roma have attended cultural events dedicated to their culture and language (SR: 70.6%, AR: 23.5%), as shown by the Chi-square test (χ^2 (1, n = 34) = 7.556, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, Sremski Roma attended various folklore manifestations, religious manifestations, and "other events" which they described as dances. These include *Ciganski bal* "the Gypsy ball", which used to be held in Batajnica, several events organised by a local school, as well as *igranke* "dances" that were frequent in the last decades of the 20th century. Some respondents also mention an important event organised in the village of Jakovo (in the Srem region), namely the celebration of St. Paraskeva (*Sveta Petka*) in August, where numerous Roma gather and celebrate alongside Serbian people. Arli Roma mentioned the dances held in the town of Bujanovac in 1977 and in the town of Prokuplje (southern Serbia), as well as events organised for Roma Day, one of which was organised at a local school in Batajnica.

However, it is noteworthy that the folklore manifestations and the Roma dance (*Ciganski bal*) the respondents mentioned no longer exist. They were characteristic of the former Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s, while the last events of this kind were organised in the 1990s, according to the respondents (see also Ćirković & Mirić, forthcoming, for a similar observation regarding southeastern Serbia).

It should also be noted that more Sremski Roma are aware of associations or cultural centres that used to provide access to their culture and language (SR: 43.8%, AR: 12.5%). They mention the existence of the Association of Roma in Batajnica and the villages of Šimanovci and Buđanovci (in the Srem region). However, these associations are no longer active, with some respondents indicating that they were last active around 20 years ago.

4. Discussion

The study presented in this chapter is based on the responses to selected questions from the sociolinguistic *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*, which was applied in the Sremski Roma and Arli Roma communities in the Belgrade suburb of Batajnica.

The analysis revealed various similarities between Sremski Roma and Arli Roma in their linguistic backgrounds. Most interviewees are at least bilingual in Romani and Serbian and mention Romani as their mother tongue and their first language. They acquired Romani in early childhood, being raised by family members who spoke Romani fluently. This, in addition to the fact that they transmit the language to their children who mainly speak Romani fluently, points towards uninterrupted language transmission in both communities.

However, descriptive statistics reveals some potential differences, indicating that more members of the Arli Roma community communicate in Romani most frequently, and fewer Arli Roma use Serbian when communicating with their partners and children. In contrast, Sremski Roma use Serbian to a larger extent, and more respondents from this community perceive Romani as being lost. These potential differences should be investigated in more detail in future studies on a larger sample of respondents. They may indicate stronger language maintenance among the Arli Roma in Batajnica, while also suggesting the potential vulnerability of Romani within the Sremski Roma community.

The positive attitudes concerning Romani and its connection to the Roma cultural identity, as well as the views on the importance of language transmission and maintenance, remain similar in both communities under study. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that language is one of the most important markers of the Roma identity. According to a study that examined several determinants of the social and cultural identity of the Roma community in Serbia on a sample of over 1200 respondents (Petrović & Miltojević 2020), the Roma in Serbia perceive "music, their own language, and Romani customs as three key pillars of identifying their own ethnic group", while tribal affiliation, Romani cuisine, and Romani clothing are the least valued markers (Petrović & Miltojević 2020: 207). This also holds for some other Roma communities in Serbia, e.g. the Gurbet community in the southeastern Serbian town of Knjaževac,

whose members overwhelmingly highlight Romani as an important marker of their identity (see Ćirković & Mirić, forthcoming, and Mirić 2024 for the attitudes of elementary-school pupils).

Regarding the domains of language use, in both communities, Romani is restricted to private, informal communication with family and friends, while it remains absent from official and formal language usage, as well as the linguistic landscape, particularly in official signage, where Serbian as the official state language prevails. These findings underscore the challenges both communities face in promoting and preserving their language. Romani remains invisible in the public space regardless of the affirmative legislative framework of the Republic of Serbia, which guarantees the language rights of minority communities in Serbia through the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia,[33] as well as several laws, such as the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities[34] and the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts.[35] Furthermore, although Serbian legislation allows elementary schools to introduce the optional subject "Romani language with elements of national culture" if at least 15 students apply, the local elementary school most respondents' children attend has not done so. As a result, Roma children only speak Serbian at school, which may further contribute to the vulnerability of their language (see Mirić, forthcoming).

The responses to the questionnaire regarding cultural events further highlight that folklore and musical events, as well as cultural centres that once served to gather Roma, no longer exist in Batajnica and beyond. This situation calls for the attention of the relevant authorities of the Roma minority, on the one hand, and more active involvement of the members of the community, on the other. These insights further reflect broader themes of cultural heritage, community identity, and the ongoing struggle for visibility and recognition.

Notable differences emerge between the communities regarding particular aspects of language usage. Arli Roma demonstrate a higher frequency of Romani use compared to Sremski Roma when interacting with

[33] "Official Gazette of the RS", no. 98/2006 and 115/2021.

[34] "FRY Official Journal", No. 11/2002, "SaM Official Journal", No. 1/2003 – Constitutional Charter and "RS Official Gazette", Nos. 72/2009 – other law, 97/2013 – CC decision and 47/2018.

[35] "Official Gazette of the RS", no. 45/91, 53/93 – other law, 67/93 – other law, 48/94 – other law, 30/10, 101/05 – other law, 47/18 and 48/18 – correction.

neighbours and discussing social topics. Additionally, a larger share of Arli Roma reported encountering inscriptions in Romani on gravestones, and more of them also employ Romani for devotional purposes (prayer). This indicates that for Arli Roma, language and religion are closely connected, both being part of their Roma identity. Although the relationship between language and religion is not necessarily causal, numerous studies have shown that religious practices may affect the maintenance and the loss of languages (see Souza 2016 for an overview).

On the other hand, Sremski Roma are more integrated or even assimilated into the majority Serbian society, having lived in the settlement for a longer period and belonging to the same religion as the majority population. These findings should be further explored and contextualized with the research which showed that the language practices of Roma significantly differ across different regions of Serbia (Petrović 2019: 216–217). Namely, Romani is preserved better in the south and southeast of Serbia, while the Roma living in the Belgrade region, Vojvodina, Šumadija and the west rarely use their mother tongue.

Overall, the results point toward a need to examine Roma communities separately to assess the level of their language vulnerability. As the study conducted in the settlement of Batajnica suggests, it is the Sremski Roma community that employs Romani less frequently, using Serbian, the state language, across numerous domains. Conversely, previous research centred on the Roma community in the town of Knjaževac in eastern Serbia revealed that the sedentary Arli Roma population experienced a complete shift to Serbian as the official state language, likely in the early 20th century (Sikimić 2017). In contrast, the Gurbet Roma community, which settled in the area later, continues to actively pass on the language to younger generations and preserves Romani (Ćirković & Mirić 2017, Sikimić 2018). These findings indicate that assessments of language vulnerability and endangerment of Romani varieties should take into account dialectal diversity and various extralinguistic factors, providing separate estimates for distinct varieties.

Additionally, for the Roma communities that show signs of language vulnerability, various measures ought to be taken to ensure language preservation. As Petrović remarked, the need to preserve the ethnic distinctiveness of the Romani community, which – in the absence of its own state and institutional mechanisms for supporting cultural and linguistic identity – needs its language to stay an ethnic community, cannot be the only

motivation for safeguarding their mother tongue (Petrović 2019: 213). "The use of languages is not just a linguistic or cultural issue but also a reflection of the social position of a minority ethnic group within the majority with another official language, within other language practices considered legitimate." (ibid.).

5. Concluding remarks

The goal of this study was to investigate similarities and differences between the Sremski Roma and Arli Roma communities in the Belgrade suburban settlement of Batajnica. The study focused on several sociolinguistic aspects, such as the respondents' linguistic background, their attitudes towards their own language, issues of language identity and maintenance, and various language usage domains. The results indicate that language, religious practices, and in-group identity are tightly connected and may affect the vulnerability of Romani varieties. In the case of the two Romani varieties under study, belonging to different groups of Romani dialects whose speakers settled in the area at different times and belong to different religious denominations, this research showed that Romani could be considered less vulnerable in the Arli Roma community than in the Sremski Roma community. This finding is supported by the quantitative analysis, which revealed that more Arli Roma use Romani with different persons and across more diverse domains. Notably, they employ Romani during prayer and have the opportunity to see inscriptions in Romani on gravestones.

The study is based on the responses to the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*, which served as a valuable tool for investigating language vulnerability in these Roma communities. Nevertheless, this study's chief limitation is the relatively small number of respondents (35). Therefore, several statistically significant differences obtained in the study were not taken into account due to the small number of responses in some answer categories. For this reason, the study could be considered a pilot providing the first insights into different levels of vulnerability of different Romani varieties spoken in the same place. In the future, more participants should be interviewed in the settlement of Batajnica, but also beyond this location. Many Arli Roma live in other settlements in the municipality of Zemun, and it would be useful to compare their sociolinguistic situation. Further, Sremski Roma inhabiting numerous

villages and towns in the Srem region also await thorough sociolinguistic research of this type. A larger sample size would also allow for investigating whether the differences between the Roma groups depend on respondents' age, gender or education levels, which is currently impossible due to small number of participants.

It should be noted that the study presented self-reported results, which do not always reflect precise reality but rather what the respondents wish to project—often reflecting a desired state or fears. For instance, in both Roma communities the majority of respondents and their children use Romani in everyday life. Yet, in the Sremski Roma community, most respondents perceive their language as disappearing, possibly reflecting their fear of language loss.[36]

Finally, the study identified several specific areas where the communities could be supported in preserving and promoting the language, such as reopening cultural centres and bringing back events that were once vital to the local Roma community but have ceased to exist in the past two decades. Relying on the information from this study, local governments and cultural organizations can play a crucial role in this effort by providing resources and expertise to help reestablish these centres and events. By working closely with the two Roma communities, they can effectively address their needs. These initiatives may also help the communities connect with one another and improve the chances for language preservation regardless of the variety they speak.

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[36] The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

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