

**Mirjana Mirić\***

Institute for Balkan Studies, SASA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6125-0562>

## **LITERACY PRACTICES IN ROMANI: PILOT DATA FROM SERBIA**

This study explores adult literacy in Romani in two Roma communities in Serbia through responses to the sociolinguistic V LingS Questionnaire 1.0. Results indicate that reading and writing in Serbian significantly exceed Romani literacy, which is mostly confined to personal communication via messaging apps. Awareness of Romani-language publications, written media and language instruction remains low. Structural educational disadvantages and minimal institutional support contribute to limited written engagement. The findings suggest that promoting multidialectal, community-centred literacy and leveraging digital platforms could enhance Romani literacy, supporting multilingual competence among Roma speakers.

Keywords: Romani, Serbia, literacy, digital platforms, minority language education, sociolinguistic questionnaire

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This study explores literacy practices in the Romani language, presenting the results of the empirical study conducted within the project “Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia” (V LingS, 2022–2024). The project aimed to assess the levels of endangerment of eight minority varieties spoken in Serbia, specifically Aromanian, Banat Bulgarian, Bayash Romanian, Ladino, Megleno-Romanian, Romani, Vojvodina Rusyn, and Vlach (for details, see Sorescu-Marinković, Ćorković & Mirić, 2025). This paper focuses on the data collected within the V LingS project in several Roma communities in Serbia during fieldwork in 2023. The data were collected using the sociolinguistic *V LingS Questionnaire 1.0*, and the paper analyzes responses to selected questions that address the issue of literacy in Romani and Serbian.

---

\* [mirjana.miric@bi.sanu.ac.rs](mailto:mirjana.miric@bi.sanu.ac.rs)

Literacy competence is listed as one of the eight key competencies in the EU Council's Recommendations on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2019). It is defined as "the ability to identify, understand, express, create and interpret concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written forms [...]" Depending on the context, literacy competence can be developed in the mother tongue, the language of schooling and/or the official language in a country or region." The same source also defines multilingual competence, which is particularly relevant for this study, given that Romani speakers in Serbia are predominantly bilingual, using both their own Romani variety and Serbian as the official state language (Mirić & Ćirković, 2022; Mirić, 2025). Multilingual competence is defined as "the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication", acknowledging that "it can include maintaining and further developing mother tongue competences, as well as the acquisition of a country's official language(s)" (European Commission, 2019). Furthermore, UNESCO (2017) emphasizes the use of printed and written materials, defining literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." In light of these definitions, understanding literacy in Romani requires not only assessing individuals' ability to read and write but also considering the broader sociolinguistic and educational context in which this literacy develops, as well as the challenges faced by Romani speakers.

The paper focuses on the data collected from members of the Roma communities living in the village of Bavanište (Banat region) and the Belgrade suburban settlement of Batajnica, both in Serbia. According to the latest census (2022), Bavanište reported 475 Roma residents (9.35%), while Batajnica reported 1,224 Roma (3.6%). According to the same census, 131,936 (1.98%) individuals in the country identified as Roma,<sup>1</sup> whereas only 79,687 declared Romani as their 'mother tongue' (for more details on Roma across censuses, see Knežević, 2025). This discrepancy likely indicates that a significant number of Roma either no longer speak Romani, due to a language shift to Serbian, or choose not to disclose it as their mother tongue.

In addition to the discrepancy between the number of Roma and Romani speakers, census data from 2022 also reveal that around 80% of Roma aged 15 and above have either no schooling (13.3%), have incomplete primary education (24.6%) or only primary education (43%), compared to approximately 24% of the overall population in Serbia with the same levels of education. These figures are highly relevant for the discussion of literacy in Romani, as they point to structural educational disadvantages that likely affect literacy skills among Roma communities.

This study aims to examine the current state of literacy in Romani among adult members of Roma communities in Serbia. Its primary objective is to present empirical

---

<sup>1</sup> Unofficial estimates suggest that the number of Roma in Serbia is significantly higher.

data collected from Romani speakers and to contextualize these findings within the broader framework of existing legislation and administrative practices in Serbia, as well as previous scholarly research.

The paper is structured as follows. The remainder of the Introduction provides basic information on the Romani language, with particular attention to its status in Serbia, especially in relation to language standardization, education and available publications. The Methodology section describes the research instrument used to investigate literacy within selected Roma communities and presents the sample of respondents. The Results section is divided into several sub-sections relevant to the topic of literacy, including education, reading and writing habits (in terms of frequency and content), publications and written media in Romani, and self-assessed language proficiency. This is followed by a discussion of the results, focusing on potential areas for improving literacy in the Romani language. The paper concludes with a summary of the key findings.

### 1.1 Romani in Serbia

Romani is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by at least 3 to 4 million people worldwide, primarily in Europe. However, there are no reliable census figures on the exact number of Romani speakers (Matras, 2002, p. 238). Romani is a transnational, heterogeneous language, with at least four major dialect groups: Balkan, Vlax, Central, and Northern (Matras, 2002). Recent research suggests there may be as many as twelve dialect groups (Elšik & Beníšek, 2020). In Serbia and the Balkans, the Vlax and Balkan dialect groups dominate, both in the number of speakers and geographical spread. Within those two dialect groups, numerous varieties are spoken.

In terms of language endangerment, Romani is classified as ‘potentially vulnerable’ in the current online version of the UNESCO *World Atlas of Languages* (2024),<sup>2</sup> unlike in previous estimates, which classified Romani as ‘definitely endangered’ (Moseley, 2010). However, in recent studies (Halwachs, 2020; Leggio & Matras, 2017; Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković, 2020), linguists have argued that Romani should not be evaluated as a whole, given that particular varieties and specific areas where Romani is spoken display significantly different endangerment levels. The same holds true for Serbia, where even dialects spoken within the same settlement may differ in terms of frequency and domains of use, as well as in the degree of transmission to younger generations (Mirić, 2025).

Romani has been characterized mainly as an oral language, functionally restricted, dominated language, spoken primarily in the home (Halwachs, 2012, 2020), but some recent research has begun to shed light on the new domains of Romani

<sup>2</sup> The beta version of the UNESCO *World Atlas of Languages* across countries is available at: <https://en.wal.unesco.org/#countries> and across languages at: <https://en.wal.unesco.org/#languages>. Accessed: 12 June 2025.

language usage in the digital world (Leggio, 2011, 2020; Matras, 2015). In Serbia, the domains of usage are usually restricted to oral, informal communication in the home environment, with family members and Romani-speaking friends (Ćirković & Mirić, forthcoming; Mirić, 2025). Romani is largely absent from formal communication (Mirić, 2025) and remains virtually invisible in the linguistic landscape in Serbia (Ćirković, 2023), where Serbian, the majority language, dominates. Romani speakers in Serbia are typically bi- or multilingual, using Serbian for intergroup communication in public domains as well as in everyday life (Mirić, 2025, see also Halwachs, 2012). In terms of education, all Roma with access to schooling are educated in the state language and acquire literacy in it before acquiring literacy in Romani (Matras, 1999, p. 482). This also holds for Serbia.

**Standardization.** Although Romani lacks a single codified written form or generally accepted literary standard (Matras, 2005a; Tirard, 2023), different countries have made attempts to codify Romani varieties spoken within their territories (see more in Matras, 1999, 2005a). In Serbia, Romani has been recognized as a minority language since 2006, when the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* came into force. In 2013, the National Council of the Roma National Minority of Serbia passed a resolution on the standardization of the Romani language, while the book “Standardizacija romskog jezika” [Standardization of the Romani language] (Đurić, 2012) was published in 2012.<sup>3</sup> The standardized form was founded on elements derived largely from the Gurbet variety, but also from the Kalderash and Leyash varieties (Aleksandrović, 2024), all belonging to the Vlax dialect group. In terms of orthography, it is based on the Latin rather than the Cyrillic script of the majority Serbian language. However, it has been pointed out that this standardized form has not been widely accepted. According to Aleksandrović (2024), there are several reasons for this, such as insufficient promotion efforts by the National Council of the Roma National Minority, a limited number of textbooks written for the elective subject taught in schools, the fact that Romani writers do not use the standard, as well as the diversity of Romani dialects (Aleksandrović, 2024, pp. 330–331). Studies on Romani language instruction at primary schools in Knjaževac (eastern Serbia) and the village of Bavanište (Banat) also emphasized the problem of overlooking the diversity of Romani dialects in curriculum design and textbook development (Mirić, 2019; Mirić, forthcoming).

**Education.** In Serbia, language education policies generally promote multilingualism, with a legal framework supporting minority language instruction. Minority language education in Serbia includes three modalities: 1) Complete education in one of the eight national minority languages (Albanian, Bosnian,

<sup>3</sup> According to Matras (2005a, p. 9), when describing the local or regional initiatives, the term ‘codification’ is more appropriate, as it refers to the process of creating a written form of a language, without the ambition to impose it globally as a ‘standard’ on all Roma communities.

Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Rusyn, Slovak, and Croatian), with the mandatory subject *Serbian as a non-native language*; this modality is not applied to Romani; 2) Complete education in Serbian with an elective subject *Mother tongue/speech with elements of national culture*, offered for 16 minority languages, including Romani; 3) Bilingual education in Serbian and a national minority language, not applicable to Romani.

In primary school, Romani is taught as an elective subject, *Romani language with elements of national culture*, with 72 45-minute classes per year. Romani language classes were initiated in the territory of Vojvodina in two schools during the school year 1997/1998 and were attended by 70 pupils (Aleksandrović, 2024, p. 337, see also Dimić, 1997), but it wasn't until the 2016/2017 school year that classes began in central Serbia (Apostolovic, 2023, pp. 34, 37).<sup>4</sup> The number of pupils in Serbian schools increased over the years, and in the 2024/2025 school year, there were 1,691 pupils enrolled from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, according to the open data of the Ministry of Education.<sup>5</sup> However, as demonstrated by earlier empirical studies (Aleksandrović, 2024; Apostolovic, 2023; Mirić, 2019, 2024, forthcoming), a considerable gap exists between the opportunities offered by Serbia's legal framework for integrating Romani into the education system and the actual implementation of these opportunities. While the legislation allows for Romani language instruction, many Roma families remain unaware of this option, suggesting that either the Ministry of Education and schools have not effectively promoted these classes or that there is a shortage of qualified Romani language teachers (Aleksandrović, 2024; Mirić, forthcoming). In addition, some scholars argue that the standardization of Romani caused a significant delay in the introduction of the language in schools; moreover, once Romani was standardized, some students were reluctant to learn it in school (Apostolovic, 2023, p. 34).

Courses in Romani were also offered at the university level, for a short period, at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade from 2015 to 2017 (Aleksandrović, 2024, pp. 339–340; Ćirković, 2018, p. 245). They ceased to exist due to insufficient interest from students of the Faculty of Philology and a lack of promotional efforts made by the Faculty and the National Council of the Roma National Minority (Aleksandrović, 2024, p. 339). Currently, Romani is taught only at Visoka strukovna škola za vaspitače “Mihajlo Pavlov” [Higher Vocational Preschool and Medical School “Mihajlo Pavlov”] in Vršac (Aleksandrović, 2024, pp. 339–340; see also Tirard, 2023, for a recent overview of Romani language instruction across education levels in various European countries).

<sup>4</sup> The initiation of Romani language classes in the two regions followed different approaches (see Apostolovic, 2023, p. 37). In Vojvodina, the Romani language instruction followed a bottom-up approach, based on the standardization proposed by Trifun Dimić, who authored the first textbook in Romani. In central Serbia, classes were introduced through a top-down approach, supported by the National Council of the Roma National Minority.

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://opendata.mpn.gov.rs/otvoreni-podaci/osnovno-obrazovanje.html>. Accessed: 12 June 2025.

The implementation of Romani language teaching is an issue raised by other scholars as well. Halwachs (2012) notes that, in the case of Romani, authorities rarely implement top-down measures directly. One reason for this is the plurality of Romani dialects, as educational authorities are accustomed to dealing with standardized, homogeneous languages in schools. Furthermore, Romani is not used systematically to teach literacy to children who have acquired it as their mother tongue during their primary socialisation (Halwachs, 2012).

**Publications and media.** Different types and genres of Romani-language publications exist in Serbia, pointing to a prolific production by and for Romani-language speakers. The brief overview below does not aim to be exhaustive, but to provide examples across several types of relatively recent publications and written media.

In the domain of education, the materials used in classes consist of language primers, textbooks and workbooks intended for pupils from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, published in the standardized language (Aleksandrović, 2024; Mirić, forthcoming). However, in schools where Romani has been introduced as an elective subject, a major obstacle is the disparity between the standardized form of Romani taught and represented in the textbooks and the local dialects spoken by pupils (Apostolovic, 2023; Mirić, 2024, forthcoming).

As for literature in Romani, the earliest examples of literature appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For a long time, Romani was documented only in academic publications or written by non-Roma authors, particularly in religious translations since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Leggio, 2011, 2020). However, beginning in the 1970s, Roma themselves began writing in Romani, driven by the rise of Roma rights activism and the emergence of a Romani intellectual movement (Leggio, 2011, 2020; Matras, 2015). A notable rise in the use of Romani in books, translations, and periodicals created by and for Roma communities has been evident since the 1989–1990 period (Matras, 1999, p. 483; Zahova, 2020, p. 539). More pertinently for this paper, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began supporting Romani cultural production in the 1960s, when Roma were recognized as an ethnic group. This, in addition to the participation of Yugoslav Roma activists within the international Romani movement, led to Romani language literature production, primarily in the form of bilingual poetry books by Romani authors (Zahova, 2020, pp. 544–545).

In addition to the language textbooks used in schools or literature in Romani, a range of other publications in Romani is available in Serbia (and former Yugoslavia). These include dictionaries (e.g., Ćirković & Mirić, 2017; Haliti, 2011), grammar books (e.g., Đurić, 2005), story collections (e.g., Tahirović-Sijerčić, 2022), children's literature (e.g., Simić & Stojadinović, 2022), as well as literary and Bible translations (see, among others, <https://rombib.com/>).

Written media in Romani also exist, such as newspapers, news periodicals, and various news portals available online (e.g., <https://www.romanenevimata.rs/>,

<https://romaworld.rs/rm/startno/>), but they are rare. A closer look at online portals publishing news in both Serbian and Romani shows that only some news items are available in both languages, while the majority are published exclusively in Serbian (e.g., <https://romaworld.rs/rm/startno/>). A Romani magazine, *Romano lil*, and a children's magazine, *Čhavrikano lil*, had a long tradition of publishing in Serbia. Even two issues of the weekly periodical *Politikin zabavnik* (written in Serbian) included a comic book translated into Romani (issued 29 March 2024 and 5 April 2024).

**Internet.** For a long time, the use of written Romani remained largely confined to Roma intellectuals and texts such as news periodicals, translations of world literature, literacy primers, collections of Romani fairy tales and original poetry (Leggio, 2020; Matras, 2015; Zahova, 2020). However, with the rise of the Internet, broader segments of the Roma population gained the opportunity to write in their language (Matras, 2005b, 2015). Importantly, the Google Translate platform has included Romani among the languages available for translation since 2024.

Analyses of Romani use on so-called Web 1.0 platforms, i.e., “static web pages and interactive spaces allowing for both asynchronous (newsletters, forums) and synchronous (chat rooms) one-to-many communication” (Leggio, 2020, p. 516), show that Roma individuals employ written Romani to “replicate the conviviality of face-to-face encounters” (Leggio, 2015, p. 110). Over the last decade or so, the use of Romani has expanded to Web 2.0 platforms such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and other social networks. These online media represent a new domain of language use that is particularly important for developing literacy, as they require only basic literacy skills without adherence to specific codification systems or norms (Matras, 2015, p. 303). They are characterized by ‘linguistic pluralism’ (Matras, 2005b), i.e., variation in orthography and grammar (see also Leggio, 2020, p. 517), and are not limited to particular countries or communities, enabling Roma from diverse backgrounds and linguistic varieties to engage with one another.

Regardless of the prolific production in Romani, Matras (2005a, p. 12) notes that many uses of written Romani serve an emblematic function, as they are intended to demonstrate that it is possible to produce written culture in Romani and that Romani can function as an “all-purpose language”. Halwachs (2012) also notes that most texts in Romani primarily serve symbolic functions, i.e., demonstrating the language's capacity for broader use, asserting cultural equality, and expressing aspirations for Roma sociopolitical integration. Although Romani is present across various media, it is still marginalized, and its use also remains largely symbolic, with most speakers engaging primarily with mainstream media in dominant languages (Halwachs, 2012). Therefore, the central question in this study is not the (un-)availability of publications and written media in Romani, but whether members of the Roma community are aware of these materials and whether they possess the literacy skills and interest needed to access and engage with them.

## 1.2 Aims

Considering previous research that characterizes Romani as primarily an oral language used in the home, but also the expansion of written Romani due to the diffusion of the Internet, the goal of this study is to explore and understand the current state of literacy in Romani among adult members of Roma communities in Serbia. The study also aims to assess both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of literacy in Romani, identify gaps in education and access to written materials, and highlight opportunities for strengthening written Romani, particularly through modern digital communication.

## 2. METHODOLOGY: INSTRUMENT AND SAMPLE

### 2.1 Instrument: V LingS Questionnaire 1.0

The study is based on the responses to the sociolinguistic *V LingS Questionnaire 1.0* (Mirić et al., 2025), which was created to assess the levels of language endangerment or vulnerability in several minority communities in Serbia, including the Roma community. The questionnaire is divided into 16 sections, comprising 151 questions (see Mirić et al., 2025, for details and the English version of the questionnaire).<sup>6</sup>

This paper investigates the responses to the selected questions across 6 sections of the questionnaire (Literacy, Education, Publications in Romani, Media, Language level self-assessment, and Demographic information about the respondent). The analyzed questions focus on whether the respondents are literate, their education levels, their reading and writing habits and frequency, the type of content they read and write, and how they self-evaluate their reading and writing skills. Additionally, the paper examines issues of education in Romani and awareness of written publications and printed or online media in Romani. These questions are explored across Romani as the respondents' 'mother tongue' and Serbian as the official state language to detect areas in which Serbian as the official language may dominate.

The questionnaire was applied in person, and the data were audio-recorded and stored in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, in the dedicated V LingS Archive, under a unique code to ensure anonymity. The responses were entered into a database created in the SPSS program.

### 2.2 Sample

The questionnaire was administered by the author of this paper in 2023 to 56 respondents in two Roma communities in Serbia: the Belgrade suburban settlement of Batajnica (N=35) and the village of Bavanište in the Banat region (N=21). Although this paper focuses solely on the responses from the two locations, the *V LingS Questionnaire 1.0* was administered to 686 members of the aforementioned minority

<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire applied in the Roma community is available in Serbian: [https://vlings.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/VLingS\\_upitnik\\_romski.pdf](https://vlings.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/VLingS_upitnik_romski.pdf). Accessed: 12 June 2025.

communities, out of which 290 were members of the Roma community in the following locations: the village of Bavanište (northern 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.

Fifty-six respondents participated in this study (see Table 1 for demographic details). All respondents signed an informed consent form before the interviews, in which they were informed about the aims of the study, participating institutions, data anonymization procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study.

Respondents differ regarding the Romani dialects they speak. Roma from the village of Bavanište speak the Banat Romani variety, belonging to the Northern Vlach dialect group (ROMLEX).<sup>7</sup> In the settlement of Batajnica, two varieties are spoken: the Sremski Romani variety, belonging to the Southern Vlach group, and Arli Romani, belonging to the Balkan group (see more in Mirić, 2025). Dialectal diversity exceeds the scope of this paper and will not be analyzed. However, future studies may explore how specific varieties affect literacy, particularly in terms of their similarities with the standardized language.

|                 |                              | Roma community |           |
|-----------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
|                 |                              | Batajnica      | Bavanište |
| Gender          | Male                         | 17             | 7         |
|                 | Female                       | 18             | 14        |
| Age range       | 18–29                        | 10             | 4         |
|                 | 30–44                        | 9              | 9         |
|                 | 45–59                        | 12             | 4         |
|                 | 60+                          | 4              | 4         |
| Religion        | Orthodox Christian           | 16             | 19        |
|                 | Catholic                     | /              | 1         |
|                 | Muslim                       | 18             | /         |
|                 | Other                        | 1              | 1         |
| Education level | Without schooling            | 6              | 9         |
|                 | Unfinished primary school    | 6              | 9         |
|                 | Primary school               | 17             | 3         |
|                 | Three-year vocational school | 4              | /         |
|                 | Higher vocational school     | 1              | /         |
|                 | Other (evening school)       | 1              | /         |

Table 1: Respondents' demographic information

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <http://romani.uni-graz.at/romlex/>. Accessed August 16, 2025.

The uneven distribution across gender, age, and education level stems from the unavailability or reluctance to participate of potential respondents in different categories. Therefore, it is impossible to conduct a statistical analysis across some of these demographic categories. Given the relatively small number of participants, this study can be considered a pilot aimed at identifying specific factors that may affect the current state of literacy in Romani. Nevertheless, as the statistical analyses in the next section demonstrate, the number of respondents is adequate for observing various literacy trends characterizing the Roma communities under investigation.

3. RESULTS

In this section, the results of the quantitative analysis are presented across different sections of the questionnaire related to literacy, namely, literacy and education, reading and writing habits (frequency and content type), Romani language classes, publications in Romani, written media in Romani, and self-assessment of language proficiency.

3.1 Literacy and education

When asked whether they could read and write in any language, nearly one-fifth of the respondents reported being illiterate, as 19.6% (N=11) stated they cannot read and 17.9% (N=10) stated they cannot write. Illiteracy was more prevalent among female respondents, with 9 women unable to read and 8 unable to write. Regarding age, illiterate respondents were distributed as follows: 30–44 years (4 cannot read, 3 cannot write), 45–60 years (4 cannot read, 4 cannot write), and 60+ years (3 cannot read, 3 cannot write). No respondents in the youngest age group (18–29 years) reported illiteracy.

These findings are not surprising given that 26.8% of the respondents have had no formal schooling whatsoever, as shown in Table 2. Moreover, the respondents’ overall education levels reflect the low-education trend observed in the latest 2022 Census (see Introduction), with 89.3% of the respondents in this study having either no schooling, incomplete primary education, or only primary education. The pilot study conducted within the same V LingS project in the town of Knjaževac (eastern Serbia) with 30 local Roma (Ćirković & Mirić, forthcoming) yielded a similar distribution of respondents across education levels.

| Without schooling | Incomplete primary education | Primary education | Vocational school | Higher education | Other |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| 26.8%             | 26.8%                        | 35.7%             | 7.1%              | 1.8%             | 1.8%  |

Table 2: Respondents’ education levels

### 3.2 Reading and writing habits: frequency

To determine the frequency of reading and writing, respondents were asked how often they read or write in Romani and Serbian. The response options were: ‘always’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’, and ‘never’, coded in the database from 5 – ‘always’ to 1 – ‘never’. The mean ratings are given in Table 3. The data are based on the responses obtained from 44 respondents who answered these four questions. Overall, both reading (R) and writing (W) in Romani (Rom) are less frequent (R\_Rom=2.66, W\_Rom=2.36) than reading and writing in Serbian (Sr) (R\_Sr=4.45, W\_Sr=4.30).

|       | N  | Mean | SD    | Minimum | Maximum |
|-------|----|------|-------|---------|---------|
| R_Rom | 44 | 2.66 | 1.346 | 1       | 5       |
| R_Sr  | 44 | 4.45 | .875  | 2       | 5       |
| W_Rom | 44 | 2.36 | 1.123 | 1       | 5       |
| W_Sr  | 44 | 4.30 | .978  | 2       | 5       |

Table 3: Mean ratings of reading and writing frequency (1 = never, 5 = always)

A statistical analysis using the Friedman test was conducted to examine the significance of the obtained differences. The results revealed a statistically significant difference across the four options (reading in Romani, reading in Serbian, writing in Romani, writing in Serbian):  $\chi^2(3, N=44) = 83.052, p = .000$ , indicating that language use frequency varied depending on the skill and language. Post-hoc Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were further conducted to examine pairwise differences between the four language-use options. Participants reported reading in Serbian significantly more frequently than reading in Romani ( $Z = -4.910, N = 44, p = .000$ ). Writing in Serbian also differed significantly from writing in Romani, as the respondents reported writing in Serbian more frequently than in Romani ( $Z = -5.166, p = .000$ ).

In addition, we analyzed how many respondents chose specific ratings across reading and writing, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. The data are based on the responses obtained from 44 respondents who answered these four questions. The analysis shows that over half of the respondents never or rarely read in Romani (52.27%) or write in Romani (56.82%). However, the majority always or often engage in these activities in Serbian (79.54% for reading and 72.73% for writing) (Figures 1 and 2).

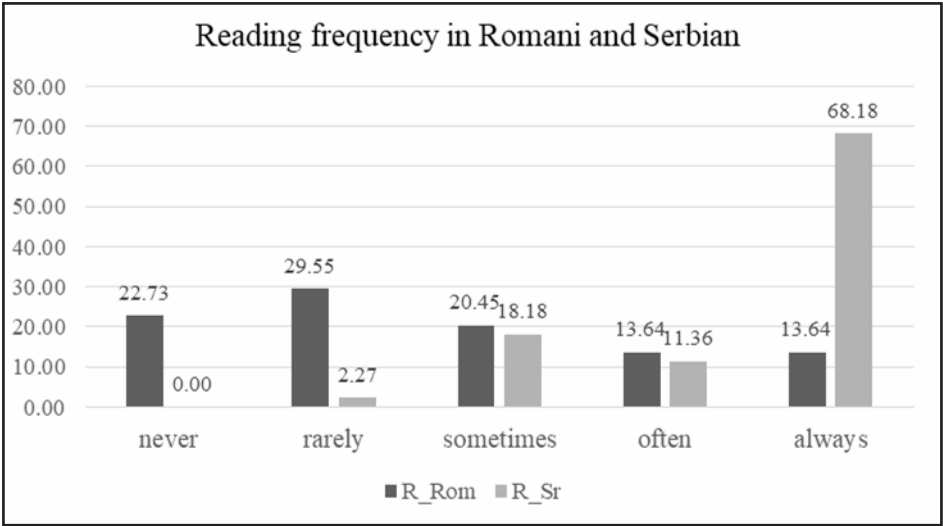


Fig. 1: Percentage of respondents by rating for reading in Romani and Serbian

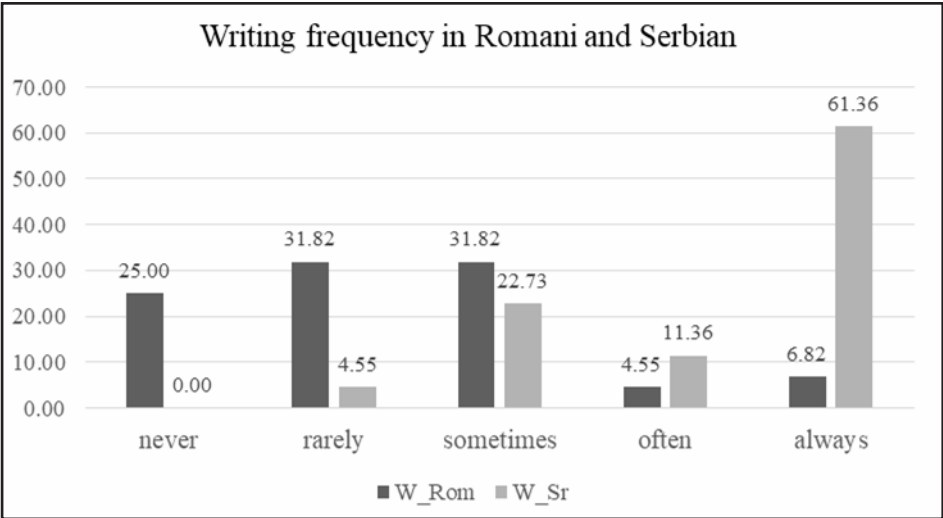


Fig. 2: Percentage of respondents by rating for writing in Romani and Serbian

**3.3 Reading and writing habits: type of content**

When it comes to the content of their reading and writing, respondents were asked if they read and write the following content in Romani and Serbian: SMS/Viber or other messages, content on social networks, and letters/emails, with the given response options ‘yes’ and ‘no’.

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of respondents mainly read and write SMS or Viber messages in Romani (R: 65.9%, W: 63.6%). Fewer read or write content on social networks (R: 47.7%, W: 34.1%), and even fewer read or write letters or emails (R: 20.5%, W: 15.9%). In contrast, both reading and writing of the same types of content in Serbian are reported by more respondents: messages (R: 95.5%, W: 95.5%), social networks (R: 81.4%, W: 75%) and letters or emails (R: 65.9%, W: 65.9%).

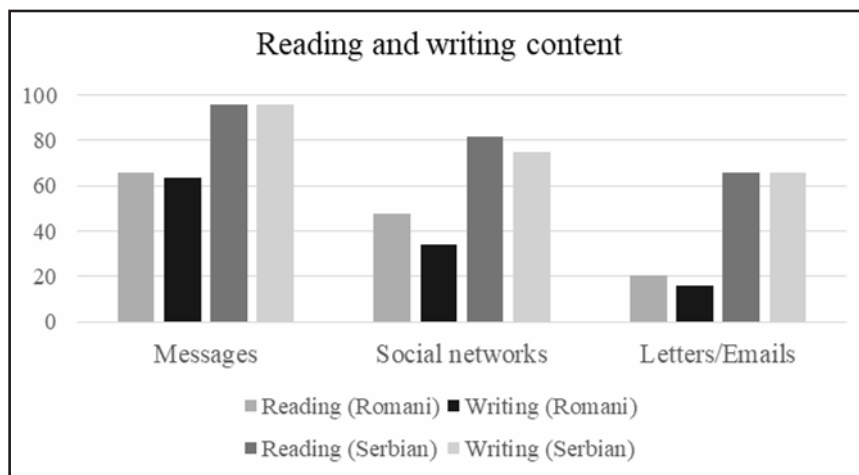


Fig. 3: Reading and writing habits by content type and language

In order to investigate if the obtained differences are significant, a Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM) with a binary logistic link function was used to assess how language (Romani vs. Serbian), skill (writing vs. reading), and content type (messages, social networks, letters/emails) predicted participants' likelihood of responding 'yes' to language use questions. Participant ID was included as a random effect.

Type III Wald Chi-Square tests showed a highly significant main effect of language ( $\chi^2(1) = 60.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that participants were significantly less likely to answer 'yes' for Romani than for Serbian when asked if they read or write particular types of content in these two languages. The effect of content type was also significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 44.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that the likelihood of 'yes' responses varied by context of language use, i.e., messages vs. social media vs. emails. The interaction between language and content type was also significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 6.09$ ,  $p = .048$ ), showing that the effect of language depends on the content type (e.g., Romani is more likely to be used for messages than emails). Skill and other interactions were not significant ( $p > .05$ ), meaning that there is no pronounced difference in reading vs. writing likelihood, overall or by content. Respondent ID was a significant random factor ( $\chi^2(43) = 66.75$ ,  $p = .012$ ), suggesting that in rare cases, personal patterns

diverged from the general group trends. However, most respondent differences were not significant, indicating that the model adequately captured the group-level effects of language, skill, and content type.

### 3.4 Romani language classes

Regarding Romani language instruction, 51.8% of the respondents reported being aware of the existence of a school subject dedicated to teaching Romani. The statistical analysis using the Chi-square test revealed a significant difference based on place of residence ( $\chi^2(2) = 14.619$ ,  $p = .001$ ), indicating that the majority of respondents from the village of Bavanište knew about the classes (81%), compared to the lower percentage of respondents from the settlement of Batajnica (34.3%). This discrepancy is not unexpected as Romani language classes are offered at the primary school in Bavanište, but not in any of the three schools in Batajnica (including one with a substantial number of Roma pupils, see Mirić, 2025, for details). Notably, only three respondents, all from the younger generation, had attended classes of the elective subject *Romani language with elements of national culture*. These data align with previous empirical studies indicating the gap between the opportunities for introducing Romani in schools and the actual implementation of these opportunities (Aleksandrović, 2024; Mirić, forthcoming).

### 3.5 Publications in Romani

When it comes to publications written in Romani, only 26.8% of the respondents mentioned that they are aware of libraries in Serbia that offer publications written in Romani, while 51.8% reported that they know of literature written in Romani, such as poems or novels.

When asked which types of publications exist in Romani, with the given response options: ‘dictionaries’, ‘grammar books’, ‘language textbooks’, ‘scientific articles about Romani’, ‘religious publications’ and ‘other’, the respondents most frequently mentioned language textbooks (7.1%) or religious publications (10.7%), while 17.9% chose multiple answers. Approximately half of them (51.8%) stated that they did not know, and 12.5% did not respond.

These findings suggest that most respondents are not well-acquainted with available publications in Romani. Language textbooks were likely mentioned because some respondents’ (grand)children attend Romani language classes and use these materials, while religious publications are often distributed in Romani across Serbia. Nonetheless, only 12.5% ( $N=7$ ) of respondents reported having personally used any publications in the Romani language (primarily religious publications), highlighting a significant gap between availability and actual use.

### 3.6 Written media in Romani

The section on media in the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* included several questions about various types of media available in Romani. However, this study focuses solely on written media.

When asked whether any of the following exist in Romani: newspapers, internet websites or social networks dedicated to media, only 5.5% (N=3) of the respondents said they are familiar with newspapers in Romani. However, only two had read those newspapers. A larger share of respondents was familiar with internet websites (23.2%) and media content on social networks (32.1%) written in Romani. However, just 17.9% of respondents reported reading Romani-language media content on internet websites, and 23.2% on social media.

While the overall numbers remain low, these findings suggest that digital platforms are currently the most effective medium for written media in Romani.

### 3.7 Self-assessment of language proficiency

The respondents were asked to evaluate how proficient they are in Romani and Serbian across four skills (understanding, speaking, reading, writing) on a 5-point scale (1 – not at all, 2 – poorly, 3 – well, 4 – very well, 5 – excellent). Mean ratings are given in Table 4.

| Skill         | Romani (Mean) | Serbian (Mean) |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Understanding | 4.77          | 4.93           |
| Speaking      | 4.76          | 4.87           |
| Reading       | 3.33          | 4.48           |
| Writing       | 3.15          | 4.57           |

Table 4: Mean ratings of self-assessed language proficiency

A series of paired-samples t-tests was conducted to compare self-rated language skills in Romani and Serbian. There was no significant difference in understanding skills between Romani (M = 4.77, SD = .572) and Serbian (M = 4.93, SD = .322),  $t(55) = -1.921$ ,  $p = .060$ , nor in speaking skills between Romani (M = 4.76, SD = .693) and Serbian (M = 4.87, SD = .474),  $t(54) = -1.030$ ,  $p = .308$ . However, participants rated their reading skills in Romani (M = 3.33, SD = 1.550) significantly lower than in Serbian (M = 4.48, SD = 1.207),  $t(45) = -5.791$ ,  $p = .000$ . Similarly, writing skills in Romani (M = 3.15, SD = 1.633) were also rated significantly lower than in Serbian (M = 4.57, SD = .981),  $t(45) = -6.330$ ,  $p = .000$ .

In addition, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare self-rated skills within each language. In Romani, there was no significant difference between speaking and understanding skills,  $t(55) = 0.000$ ,  $p = 1.000$ , but both were rated significantly higher than reading ( $t(45) = 6.429$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $t(45) = 6.523$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively)

and writing ( $t(45) = 6.875$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $t(45) = 7.041$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively). No significant difference was detected between reading and writing skills in Romani,  $t(45) = 1.091$ ,  $p = .281$ . In Serbian, understanding and speaking were not significantly different,  $t(54) = 1.765$ ,  $p = .083$ , but both were rated higher than reading and writing. Specifically, understanding was significantly higher than reading,  $t(45) = 3.158$ ,  $p = .003$ , and writing,  $t(45) = 2.716$ ,  $p = .009$ . As in Romani, reading and writing in Serbian were not significantly different,  $t(45) = -1.000$ ,  $p = .323$ .

These findings indicate that respondents perceive their oral proficiency in Romani to be strong, while their literacy skills in the language are relatively weak. In contrast, for Serbian, all four skills are rated highly, with small but statistically significant differences showing slightly higher self-assessments in speaking and understanding than in reading and writing.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This pilot study investigated the current state of Romani literacy among adult members of two Roma communities and revealed several trends: a significant dominance of Serbian over Romani in literacy practices, limited exposure to or awareness of Romani-language educational materials, publications and written media, and a clear gap between oral fluency and written competence in Romani. These findings align with earlier research characterizing Romani as an overwhelmingly oral language (Halwachs, 2020; Mirić, 2025), but they also reveal the complexity of multilingual repertoires among Roma speakers and the evolving role of digital media.

Despite the presence of Romani in Serbia's legal and educational frameworks, the study confirms that institutional support has not yet led to widespread literacy or functional access to written Romani. This is evident in the relatively low frequency of reading and writing in Romani, limited mainly to informal digital communication such as SMS and messaging apps. The self-assessed literacy ratings reflect this pattern as well: while respondents report strong oral proficiency in Romani, their reading and writing skills are rated significantly lower. In contrast, Serbian is reported to be used consistently across all written domains, with significantly higher literacy frequency and self-assessment scores.

These findings highlight a systemic issue: the language of literacy and education in Roma communities is predominantly Serbian, while Romani remains restricted to oral domains. Given that literacy competence, as defined by the EU and UNESCO, includes the ability to interpret and create written texts in one's mother tongue (European Commission, 2019; UNESCO, 2017), this asymmetry reveals a marginalization of Romani in the domain of literacy. Furthermore, the educational disadvantage evident in the census data, but also confirmed in our sample, intensifies the problem. With over a quarter of the respondents reporting no formal education, it is unsurprising that literacy in Romani is underdeveloped.

The findings also reflect a broader issue of access and visibility. Although a diverse body of literature and written media exists in Romani, ranging from school textbooks to poetry, translations, and online content, most respondents reported being unaware of these materials, and very few reported actively using them. This confirms that the mere existence of written materials is insufficient: without active dissemination and community involvement, written Romani remains inaccessible to most.

Importantly, the data suggest that digital communication offers an important space for literacy development. Respondents were more likely to engage with Romani in digital environments than in traditional media or formal contexts. This supports findings from Leggio (2020) and Matras (2005b) on the rise of vernacular digital literacy in Romani and suggests a bottom-up approach for reinforcing written language use. The percentages of respondents who employ Romani in the digital space are still relatively low, but significantly higher than the percentages of respondents who engage with other forms of written Romani.

Furthermore, the gap between Romani oral proficiency and literacy raises questions about the implementation of standardization policies. While efforts have been made to promote a standardized form of Romani in Serbia, these have not achieved broad acceptance or use in everyday literacy practices. As the data show, written practices, where they exist, are shaped more by local needs and informal norms than by institutional models. This may point to the need for a more pluralistic approach to literacy, one that acknowledges dialect diversity rather than imposing a top-down model, especially in educational contexts (see more in Halwachs, 2020; Mirić, forthcoming). One possible solution to this issue would be the use of multidialectal teaching materials, similar to those already employed in Germany and the Czech Republic, which have been shown to motivate pupils to develop an interest in other Romani dialects (Matras, 2005a, p. 8).

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the study is based on a relatively small sample from two locations and cannot be generalized to all Roma communities in Serbia. Second, dialectal variation was not examined in detail, although it may influence literacy practices, particularly with respect to how closely specific varieties align with standard Romani. Further research is also needed to investigate regional patterns, intergenerational differences, and the role of local initiatives in supporting Romani literacy. For example, Mirić (2021) discusses the involvement of the local library in Knjaževac (eastern Serbia) in promoting Romani literature through the publication of children's books in two Romani varieties (Gurbet and Arli) with Serbian translations (e.g., Simić & Stojadinović, 2022), as well as a Romani-Serbian dictionary (Ćirković & Mirić, 2017) and a collection of narratives in Romani (Sikimić, 2018).

Finally, this study did not investigate respondents' attitudes toward written Romani or the standardized variety, which may significantly influence language use

in the written form (Levinson, 2007; Rizova, Bekar & Velkovski, 2020). According to Matras (1999, p. 483), some Roma communities “favour traditionalism which cherishes oral transmission of language and customs”, perceiving written codification as a form of outsider interference. Therefore, qualitative research, including interviews or focus groups with Roma communities in Serbia, would provide valuable insight into how Roma perceive the value, accessibility, and function of literacy in Romani today.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The results of this pilot study indicate that Roma respondents rarely engage in reading and writing in Romani. When they do, such practices are largely limited to personal communication via messaging apps. Most participants are also unaware of existing Romani-language publications or the possibility of attending Romani language classes. Additionally, they tend to rate their reading and writing skills in Romani lower than their speaking and understanding abilities. In contrast, Serbian, the official state language, dominates across all domains examined.

These findings highlight the need for substantial efforts to promote the use of Romani in written form and to motivate speakers to use written Romani beyond personal communication. Notably, the domain of modern digital communication emerges as a key space where written Romani can be more frequently used. Strengthening literacy in Romani through both educational initiatives and digital platforms could play a crucial role in supporting the language. A low level of formal education limits access to reading and writing instruction in any language, including Romani. Moreover, if Romani is primarily acquired orally within the home and not widely supported through institutional education or literacy programs, the chances of developing functional literacy in the language are significantly reduced. The combination of limited schooling and a lack of widely accepted educational materials in Romani creates additional barriers to developing reading and writing skills in the language, further contributing to its marginalization in public and educational spheres. As noted by Apostolovic (2023, p. 38), there are observable tensions between institutional policies and those practiced in schools, one of them being between the political recognition of Romani within the educational system, on the one hand, and its ambivalent and marginal place in school, on the other.

Interventions needed to meaningfully strengthen literacy in Romani could include expanding educational opportunities, developing materials in local dialects and varieties, training teachers for specific varieties, and integrating Romani into digital platforms. Policy makers should recognize the importance of community-based literacy practices, especially in digital spaces, and work to support them rather than replacing them with rigid standardization. Only an inclusive approach could help transform literacy in Romani from an exception into an everyday practice.

## References:

- Aleksandrović, M. (2024). Romski jezik u osnovnim školama u Vojvodini: Potreba za očuvanjem kulturnog identiteta [The Romani language in primary schools in Vojvodina: The need to preserve cultural identity]. In M. Mandić (Ed.), *Manjinski jezici u Vojvodini: Jezička obrazovna politika, ideologija i praksa* (pp. 323–351). Akademska knjiga.
- Apostolovic, M. (2023). *L'enseignement et l'apprentissage du romani en Serbie: entre politiques linguistiques, représentations des acteurs éducatifs et pratiques de classe* [Romani language teaching and learning in Serbia: Between language policies, educational actors' perceptions and classroom practices] [Doctoral dissertation, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III]. TEL. <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-04613936>
- Census. (2022). *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2022. godine: Nacionalna pripadnost. Podaci po opštinama i gradovima* [2022 Census of population, households and dwellings: Ethnicity. Data by municipalities and cities]. Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Pdf/G20234001.pdf>.
- Ćirković, S. (2018). Savremena lingvistička istraživanja romskih govora u Srbiji [Contemporary linguistic research on Romani dialects in Serbia]. In T. Varadi & B. Sikimić (Eds.), *Očuvanje, zaštita i perspektive romskog jezika u Srbiji* (pp. 229–252). Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Ćirković, S. (2023). The Romani language in the linguistic landscape of Serbia: A (non)visible minority language. *Balkanica*, 54, 21–63.
- Ćirković, S., & Mirić, M. (2017). *Romsko-srpski rečnik knjaževačkog gurbetskog govora* [Romani–Serbian dictionary of the Knjaževac Gurbet variety]. Narodna biblioteka „Njegoš“.
- Ćirković, S., & Mirić, M. (forthcoming). Language vulnerability of Romani in Eastern Serbia: A pilot study. In Z. Vrzić & M. Crnić Novosel (Eds.), *Language endangerment, documentation and revitalization in Southeast Europe*. Brill.
- Dimić, T. (1997). Preduslovi za standardizaciju romskog jezika u Jugoslaviji [Preconditions for standardization of the Romani language in Yugoslavia]. *Romologija – Časopis za umetnost, kulturu i društvena pitanja Roma*, 4, 4–19.
- Đurić, R. (2005). *Gramatika romskog jezika / Gramatike e rromane čhibaki* [Grammar of the Romani language]. Otkrovenje.
- Đurić, R. (2012). *Standardizacija romskog jezika* [Standardization of the Romani language]. Udruženje „Kali Sara”.
- Elšik, V., & Beníšek, M. (2020). Romani dialectology. In Y. Matras & A. Tenser (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of Romani language and linguistics* (pp. 389–427). Palgrave Macmillan.

- European Commission. (2019). *Key competences for lifelong learning*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/297a33c8-a1f3-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- Haliti, B. (2011). *Srpsko-romski rečnik sa gramatikom i pravopisnim savetnikom* [Serbian–Romani dictionary with grammar and orthographic guide]. Prometej.
- Halwachs, D. W. (2012). Romani teaching: Some general considerations based on model cases. In European Centre for Minority Issues & The European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano (Eds.), *European yearbook of minority issues* (Vol. 11, pp. 249–269). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Halwachs, D. (2020). Language policy and planning in Romani. In Y. Matras & A. Tenser (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of Romani language and linguistics* (pp. 429–457). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Knežević, A. (2025). *Romi u popisima stanovništva Srbije – između statistike i demografske stvarnosti* [Roma in the population censuses of Serbia – Between statistics and demographic reality]. Republički zavod za statistiku.
- Leggio, D. V. (2011). The Romani Internet: Language codification and identity formation. *Annual Meeting of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Graz, Austria.
- Leggio, D. V. (2015). Radio Romani Mahala: Romani identities and languages in a virtual space. In A. Alietti, M. Olivera, & V. Riniolo (Eds.), *Virtual citizenship? Roma communities, inclusion policies, participation and ICT tools* (pp. 95–114). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Leggio, D. V. (2020). Romani on the Internet. In Y. Matras & A. Tenser (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of Romani language and linguistics* (pp. 457–478). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leggio, D. V., & Matras, Y. (2017). Orthography development on the Internet: Romani on YouTube. In M. Jones & D. Mooney (Eds.), *Creating orthographies for endangered languages* (pp. 254–275). Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, M. P. (2007). Literacy in English Gypsy communities: Cultural capital manifested as negative assets. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(1), 5–39.
- Matras, Y. (1999). Writing Romani: The pragmatics of codification in a stateless language. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(4), 481–502.
- Matras, Y. (2002). *Romani: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Matras, Y. (2005a). The status of Romani in Europe. *Report submitted to the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division*. <https://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/1/statusofromani.pdf>
- Matras, Y. (2005b). The future of Romani: Toward a policy of linguistic pluralism. *Roma Rights Quarterly*, 1, 31–44. <https://www.errc.org/roma-rights-journal/the-future-of-romani-toward-a-policy-of-linguistic-pluralism>
- Matras, Y. (2015). Transnational policy and ‘authenticity’ discourses on Romani language and identity. *Language in Society*, 44(3), 295–316.

- Mirić, M. (2019). Izazovi i značaj izvođenja nastave romskog jezika u Knjaževcu i okolini [Challenges and significance of teaching Romani in Knjaževac and the surrounding area]. In M. Sabinović, V. Stojadinović, & D. Popović Nikolić (Eds.), *Knjaževački kraj – potencijali, stanje i perspektive razvoja* (pp. 158–178). Narodna biblioteka „Njegoš“; Srpsko geografsko društvo.
- Mirić, M. (2021). Promotion and preservation of Gurbet Romani in Eastern Serbia: Actions targeted at children and youth. *Multiethnica*, 40, 29–49.
- Mirić, M. (2024). Stavovi učenika o nastavi romskog jezika u opštini Knjaževac: Pilot istraživanje [Students' attitudes toward Romani language instruction in the municipality of Knjaževac: Pilot study]. In M. Sabinović & V. Stojadinović (Eds.), *Knjaževački kraj – potencijali, stanje i perspektive razvoja 2* (pp. 232–257). Narodna biblioteka „Njegoš“; Srpsko geografsko društvo.
- Mirić, M. (2025). When two Roma communities meet: Consequences for the vulnerability of Romani in the Belgrade suburb of Batajnica. In A. Sorescu-Marinković, M. Ćorković, & M. Mirić (Eds.), *Vulnerable and endangered languages in Europe* (pp. 261–290). Institute for Balkan Studies SASA; Faculty of Philology – University of Belgrade.
- Mirić, M. (forthcoming). Romani language education in Serbia: Unveiling the discrepancy between opportunities and implementation. In V. Bopp-Filimonov & A. Sorescu-Marinković (Eds.), *Linguistic and Semiotic Landscapes of South-East European Border Regions*. Peter Lang.
- Mirić, M., & Ćirković, S. (2022). *Gurbetski romski u kontaktu: Analiza balkanizama i pozajmljenica iz srpskog jezika* [Gurbet Romani in contact: An analysis of Balkanisms and borrowings from Serbian]. Balkanološki institut SANU.
- Mirić, M., Sorescu-Marinković, A., Sokolovska, V., Vlajić, D., Babić, A., Ćorković, M., Ćirković, S., Paunović Rodić, S., Sokolović, D., Pons, N., Miličević Petrović, M., & Ramač, J. (2025). V LingS Questionnaire 1.0. In A. Sorescu-Marinković, M. Ćorković, & M. Mirić (Eds.), *Vulnerable and endangered languages in Europe* (pp. 337–379). Institute for Balkan Studies SASA; University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philology.
- Moseley, C. (Ed.). (2010). *Atlas of the world's languages in danger* (3rd ed.). UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187026>
- Rizova, E., Bekar, M., & Velkovski, Z. (2020). Educational challenges of Roma minorities: The case of the Republic of North Macedonia. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education*, 8(3), 113–122.
- Sikimić, B. (Ed.). (2018). *Jezik i tradicija knjaževačkih Roma* [Language and tradition of the Roma of Knjaževac]. Narodna biblioteka „Njegoš“.
- Simić, Lj., & Stojadinović, V. (2022). *Žaba nevesta: Romska narodna priča = E žamba bori: Romani paramiča* [Frog the bride: A Romani folk tale]. Narodna biblioteka „Njegoš“.

- Sorescu-Marinković, A., Mirić, M., & Ćirković, S. (2020). Assessing linguistic vulnerability and endangerment in Serbia: A critical survey of methodologies and outcomes. *Balkanica*, 51, 65–104.
- Sorescu-Marinković, A., Ćorković, M., & Mirić, M. (2025). What the European vulnerable and endangered languages tell us: An editors' introduction. In A. Sorescu-Marinković, M. Ćorković, & M. Mirić (Eds.), *Vulnerable and endangered languages in Europe* (pp. 9–20). Institute for Balkan Studies SASA; University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philology.
- Tahirović-Sijerčić, H. (Ed.). (2022). *Rromane paramiča = Romske priče. Zbirka 3 / [sakupio] Rade Uhlik* [Stories in Romani. Volume 3, collected by Rade Uhlik]. Fond otvoreno društvo BiH; Zemaljski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine.
- Tirard, A. (2023). Education in Romani and Romani teaching. In I. Andrijanić (Ed.), *Roma as an Indian diaspora – Unbreakable ties* (pp. 137–177). Croatian Romani Union 'Kali Sara'.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Literacy rates continue to rise from one generation to the next: Global literacy trends today*. <http://on.unesco.org/literacy-map>
- UNESCO World Atlas of Languages. (2024). *World Atlas of Languages*. <https://en.wal.unesco.org>
- Zahova, S. (2020). Romani language literature. In Y. Matras & A. Tenser (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of Romani language and linguistics* (pp. 539–569). Palgrave Macmillan.

### Acknowledgment:

The author is grateful to all respondents who participated in the study, to the audience of *The 8th International Congress of Applied Linguistics Today – Modern Approaches to Old And New Challenges* (ALT8) (Belgrade, 23–25 May 2025) for their generous feedback, and to the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

The manuscript is the result of the project “Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia” (VLingS), funded by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (grant number: 7736100) within the program IDEAS (2022–2024) and the author's activity at the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), which is financed by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia based on the Agreement on the Implementation and Financing of Scientific Research Work in 2025, no. 451-03-136/2025-03 dated 27 January 2025.

**Mirjana Mirić**

## **PISMENOST NA ROMSKOM JEZIKU: PILOT PODACI IZ SRBIJE**

### **Rezime**

Istraživanje se bavi pismenošću na romskom jeziku među odraslim članovima dve romske zajednice u Srbiji: u selu Bavanište (Banat) i prigradskom naselju Batajnica (Beograd). Podaci su prikupljeni sociolingvističkim upitnikom „VLingS Questionnaire 1.0“, a rad je fokusiran na kvantitativnu analizu odgovora ispitanika na pitanja vezana za pismenost, obrazovanje, sadržaj i učestalost čitanja i pisanja, romski jezik u školama, publikacije i pisane medije na romskom, kao i samoprocenu jezičkih veština. Rezultati pokazuju dominaciju srpskog jezika u svim domenima, dok je pismenost na romskom ograničena uglavnom na ličnu digitalnu komunikaciju (privatne poruke i društvene mreže). Većina ispitanika nije upoznata sa postojećim publikacijama ili časovima romskog jezika, a samoprocena nivoa čitanja i pisanja u romskom znatno je niža nego za razumevanje i govor. Pismenost na romskom je takođe ograničena nizom obrazovnih i institucionalnih faktora, uključujući nizak nivo formalnog obrazovanja ispitanika. Studija ukazuje na potrebu za razvojem lokalnih i dijalekatski prilagođenih obrazovnih materijala, jačanjem nastave romskog jezika i podrškom pismenosti kroz digitalne medije, kako bi se romski jezik učinio vidljivijim i funkcionalnijim u pisanom obliku.

**Ključne reči:** romski jezik, Srbija, pismenost, digitalne platforme, obrazovanje na manjinskim jezicima, sociolingvistički upitnik