

Romani in the Czech Sociolinguistic Space

Eva Eckert

Abstract. The study was prompted by the question of whether Romani, the language of the dominant and traditional minority, is acceptable as a language in the profile of a bilingual living in the Czech Republic. It outlines the situation of Romani in the Czech sociolinguistic space and argues for its rehabilitation so that it could be studied, taught, maintained in a community, and used to represent its speakers. This is necessary in order to raise its prestige, positively affect its speakers' identity and in turn stimulate an attitudinal shift and social change. Obstacles to Romani rehabilitation are related to it being framed by Czech culture, which is driven by a standard language ideology rendering Romani a stigmatized language. Romani speakers distance themselves from Romani dialects and the ethnolect as expressions of social and economic disadvantage. Recent research has established that Romani has shown signs of language shift.

Keywords: Romani, sociolinguistic space, standard language ideology, standard culture, language shift

1 Introduction and goals

Multilingualism as a social strategy, motto, and political agenda demonstrating tolerance of human rights has been promoted in the European Union ever since it adopted and ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) in 1992. Its agenda promotes living with several languages in today's global and personal spaces as desirable and normal, and sociolinguistic and cognitive research into multilinguals' behaviors confirms that. If bilingualism is assigned the social power and cultural prestige it deserves it could become a strategy to counter the retreat of minority languages (cf. Nosková et al. 2011). But is Romani, the language of the dominant and traditional minority, acceptable in the profile of a bilingual living in the Czech Republic? The goal of the study is to point out critical issues situating Romani in the Czech sociolinguistic space and argue the need for its rehabilitation.

The study is framed by three critical issues: First, the declining usage of Romani undermines the strategy of Roma integration formulated by the Czech government and the Ministry of Education (Ministry 2014). These institutions view integration as reversing negative social and educational trends in the situation of many Roma, improving their chances of decent employment, health care and living standards, erasing unreasonable and unacceptable differences between the Roma and non-Roma population, protecting the Roma from discrimination, and encouraging the development of Roma culture by including the Roma in the process (Government 2014; cf. Immigration 1997, 2011; Kubaník 2014). In Government 2006, 2009, and 2014 the institutions vowed to protect and maintain Romani as a cultural heritage so that integration does not happen at its expense. However, many Roma speakers distance themselves from their dialects in order to become "Czech", which contributes to the progressing atrophy. Due to these attitudes and historical conditions, speakers themselves, with the exception of Vlach Roma, continue abandoning their home language by not passing it onto their children. Such behavior was recommended by the

communist authorities in the past and prevails today, despite officially proclaimed goals of integration rather than assimilation.

Second, the power of standard Czech in the Czech sociolinguistic space counters initiatives of bringing Romani into schools as a foreign language as well as a language that should be accounted for during education since it has naturally shaped the cultural identity of many Roma (Hancock and Kyuchukov 2010; Matras 2004). Can the much debated social integration improve living conditions and employment expectations for the Roma to the degree that they comfortably abide in Romani (cf. Fishman 1997; Matras 2000) rather than reject it as an indicator of socio-economic disadvantage? The current situation of the Roma reveals what is well known: languages are not only objective, socially neutral instruments for conveying meaning, but also identity links (Appel and Muysken 1987: 16). Debates about identity, ethnicity, and nationality of the Roma have emerged in the 1990s but no significant action has so far been carried out that would confidently establish the Roma and their language in the Czech and/or European space (Schneiderová 2009; Vermeersh 2003). On the contrary, language atrophy has progressed, unemployment, and dependence on social subsidies has increased, and the cultural distance between the Roma and the non-Roma majority has widened (Government 2014a; Holomek 2011; Minorities 2003). The future of Romani is interlinked with that of the Roma although they and the institutions have underestimated its value (Horváth 2014).

Third, current attitudes towards the Roma and Romani, anti-Roma, and pro-Roma marches (Romea.cz 2014) that were criticized for inciting ethnic conflict (Lidovky.cz 2013) call forth the question whether Romani stands a chance of being revitalized in the context of standard Czech culture and its ideological rejection of plurality and “multiculturalism”. This has been documented by research (Gabal and Víšek 2009; Hübschmannová 2004; Uhl 2011), Amnesty International reports (2014) and the government itself noting inappropriate reporting, racially motivated crime, extremism, and ethnic animosity (Government 2009: 5, 2014, 2014a).¹ The notion that attitudes toward languages reflect attitudes towards ethnic groups whose social evaluation has direct consequences for the status of the languages is a well-established sociolinguistic principle (Fasold 1984).

Very few Roma survived the World War Two genocide and those currently living in the Czech Republic have migrated from Slovakia when they were encouraged to resettle the border regions and supply a new workforce replacing Sudetenland Germans after the war (Hübschmannová 2002, 2004; Immigration 1997).² Although mostly spontaneous, their migration was further organized by the communist state that decreed dispersion of undesirable Roma settlements in 1965. In an assimilation effort the state provided housing, financial and social support and jobs, often at the expense of the non-Roma, which induced ethnic animosity and constructed a historical memory impacting the coexistence (Hübschmannová 1999). These events have since undermined awareness of identity, ethnic pride, and language

¹ Amnesty International (2010; 2014) petitioned to take stronger action against EU members failing to implement EU anti-discrimination legislation to protect the Roma, based on evidence of widespread discrimination against Romani children in Czech education through segregation into schools for pupils with 'mild mental disabilities', Roma-only schools or classes offering lower educational standards.

² In Czech borderlands the economic infrastructure was dismantled after the collapse of communism, which made them vulnerable to economic depression. Anthropological and ethnographic research has often taken place among the Roma living there (cf. Bittnerová et al. 2012).

competence.³ Assimilation policies damaged not only kinship relations but impaired cultural continuity maintained through Romani narratives (p. 48).

The Roma have not been tied by a shared language but broken up into dialectally differentiated communities characterized by diffuse geographical settlement. They speak numerous dialects (and typically also Czech, Slovak or Hungarian) among which the prominent ones are Czech-Slovak Romani and Vlach Romani spoken by a vocal minority representing a unique strand of Roma migration (Šlajchrt 1998) that has retained cultural traditions thanks to living in enclave communities and enabling intergenerational transfer of Romani (Červenka et al. 2011). Although the Vlach and Czech-Slovak dialects have distant genetic origins and are culturally distant as well, speakers of Czech-Slovak Romani dialects agree on understanding each other, despite cultural boundaries between clans and families (Hübschmannová 1976, 1996; Immigration 2007; Neustupný 1997: 103-4; Schneiderová 2009). The research has also revealed that many Roma speak an ethnolect that is a sociolinguistic phenomenon of language contact and a hybrid variety of Czech, Romani, and Slovak (described for a Prague location by Bořkovcová 2006: 9; cf. the ethnolect theory of Thomason 2001 and Winfred 2003). A critical fact is that speaking this ethnolect rather than “proper” Czech has been identified as a cause of removing Roma children from the mainstream education and placing them in practical schools (Amnesty International 2010, 2014; Government 2009; Immigration 1997; Šulová 2007). The public discourse does not distinguish between an ethnolect and Romani, and the terms *romština* ‘Romani’ and *mluvit romsky* ‘to speak Romani’ have been used with pejorative connotations. The communist regime treated the ethnolect as a stage in the shift to Czech.

2 The Czech sociolinguistic space

In the Czech Republic, Czech has been spoken as the de facto official language resurrected through the linguocentric national revival in the 19th century. Aside from the 95% Czechs, traditional and immigrant minorities live in the Czech Republic without attracting much attention. While their numbers haven’t grown, those of the Roma and Vietnamese have been increasing and their integration has been difficult due to a cultural distance that is not only real but also promulgated by their external appearance and constructed through public perception and discourse presenting them as migrants and the ‘others’ (Homoláč 2009; Immigration 1997 and 2014). In social and political practice, Czech language defines the culture and traditional values of the nation’s members as if representing a homogeneous ethnicity (cf. Verschueren 2008). Sloboda (2010: 10-12) notes that the interconnection of language, nationality, and ethnic origin is embedded in the perception that the state is inhabited by ethnic Czechs who speak Czech as their first or maternal tongue.⁴ Despite academic concerns about society’s resistance to opening up its socio-cultural space and relaxing its anti-minority stands, Czechs defend their national integrity and oppose diversity in public discourse (see the news at <http://romea.ecn.cz/cz/romano-vodi>; Vlk 2013).

The Roma constitute the most numerous and also contentious minority, treated as excluded and labeled as *nepřizpůsobiví* [plural; ‘incapable of adjusting and living by the

³ Hübschmannová (1999: 44) records a related personal testimony: “Communists ... filled our stomachs but took away ‘romipen’ [ways of being Romani] that held us together for centuries. They taught us to think as the majority did, and our language stagnated. I’m 46 but can’t speak Romani well”.

⁴ Kroskrity (2004) defines language ideology as speakers’ beliefs that can affect and change not only attitudes and policies but also usage of specific forms and words.

cultural values of the majority’]. Their segregation has been cited in reports on the European Charter implementation (ratified in 2007) (Government 2013). The label has been used for the Roma exclusively as a euphemism by the public and the media (p. 62).⁵ The establishment of a new socio-economic structure in the 1990s forced the Roma out of the space shared with non-Roma Czechs (Hübschmannová 2002). Over the past two decades many Roma have congregated in dilapidated city dwellings and economic conditions unacceptable to the majority, and have grown increasingly impoverished, undereducated, and unemployable (Council of Europe 2009; Holomek 2011; Toušek 2011). Their social networks leading out from the community have weakened in comparison to the pre-1990s when assimilation was an intrinsic part of the socialist program (Bořkovcová 2006: 15-25 and 109; Donert 2010). Recent anthropological research brings out the fact that the degree of Roma segregation is much higher than that of other population groups and does not correspond to the overall tendencies of spatial differentiation (European Union 2009; Toušek 2011). Government 2014 drew attention to the fact that exclusion and segregation have become pronounced and the situation has dramatically worsened and affected approximately one third of the Czech Roma.⁶ It also pointed out that the Czech society views poverty and exclusion as caused by shared ethnic characteristics of the Roma and occurring only in specific locations.

Attitudes of the public and teachers who petitioned governmental organizations in 2008 not to close practical schools support continued segregation.⁷ Informal discussions and academic presentations reveal the opinion that the Roma should and are being “helped” since they are dependent on the majority but are also seen as responsible for ethnic discord due to inadequate education, wrong values, poor speaking habits, and lack of ambition to adopt Czech cultural values, which makes them unable to integrate (e.g. Eckertová 2014). The media enforce this power asymmetry and the discourse of conflict that has also shaped perceptions of the majority’s cultural purity vs. the minority’s insignificance resounding in the slogans of anti-Roma protests (ECRML Application 2009: 12; Sedláková 2006).

3 The policy of integration vs. ideology of the standard⁸

The government presented the goals of Roma integration (Government 2006; 2009) as peaceful coexistence, social prominence, equal representation, elimination of undue obstacles, preventing assimilation of race and language, development of the Romani culture, and integration into the majority. It also stated that the Roma have a natural right to their national identity and Romani, which should also be maintained and developed as part of the European

⁵ A complaint was filed to a committee in charge of investigating ethnic crimes in media usage (Uhl and Šabatová 2011).

⁶ Analysis of social and spatial exclusion in the Czech Republic carried out by the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs (2006) identified over 300 socially excluded locations (Analysis 2006). Ninety percent of the locations originated or grew significantly through immigration over the past fifteen years. The Roma formed over half of the population in those 80% locations but 90% in more than 40 % locations over all (Government 2014: 61).

⁷ A 2013 survey by the Czech Schools Inspectorate monitored 483 schools with five or more pupils with a 'mild mental disabilities' diagnosis and found that 28% of the pupils were Roma who, however, make up less than three percent of the total population. The prospects for Romani children that do make it to 'main-stream' education are not much better since they are often placed into schools and classes with lower educational standards.

⁸ The government claims to enforce the principles of Roma integration by redistributing social benefits and achieving equal representation throughout the Czech society, including the most educated, prosperous and influential social strata by 2025 (Government 2014).

cultural heritage (Government 2009: 15, 17). Integration into the mainstream society may be the goal but the practices have so far resembled those of assimilation. The contentious cohabitation of non-Roma and the Roma on the territory of today's Czech Republic is centuries deep. Although the Roma constitute 1.5 % to 4% of the population (Government 2009: 9), only 3% out of 400.000 declared Roma nationality (or Roma in combination with Czech or Slovak) during the 2001 and 2011 population censuses.⁹ The numerical discrepancy between the actual and reported population numbers is due to the Roma's reluctance to claim being Roma.¹⁰ As a result, some Roma have assimilated, abandoned Roma settlements as well as Romani and included the non-Roma in their social networks. This has not, however, prevented ethnic discrimination, linguistic profiling, and social exclusion (Canada 1997; Minority 2008). The process of losing the language through which to access Roma history and culture has weakened the Roma since ethnic and language links are vital, and language is a key carrier of ethnicity (Fishman 1997).

3.1 Teaching Romani

As part of Roma integration, the Czech Ministry of Education declared an initiative to introduce Romani as an elective to a few schools with concentrated Roma population (idnes.cz 2010).¹¹ The initial move was preceded by government-supported field research into the extent of Romani usage in selected locations (Červenka et al. 2010) and a pilot teaching project (Výuka 2010) that generated recommendations. When the initiative became public it was protested across social media and generated a debate that revealed contesting views and public xenophobia (Human Rights Watch 1996; Šimáček 2010). A most common reaction was disagreement with teaching a language perceived as inadequate, useless, and impractical; only a few experts supported the plan or proposed arguments for sustaining the language (Červenka et al. 2009; Horváth 2014; Ministry 2010). The protest implied an opposition to the Roma becoming more visible, sharing the social space, and contested the self-proclaimed rights of the majority. (As Rafa [2014] reports, protests against a "Roma flag" were symbolic of this sentiment and those in Czech Duchcov amplified the ethnic tension.)

⁹ Almost 33.000 declared Roma nationality in the 1991 population census (of whom one half claimed Romani as their mother language) but only one third of that in 2001. Over 23.000 speakers considered Romani as their mother language in 2001 (Council of Europe 2009: 6).

¹⁰ The official policies of assimilation in the inter-war and post-war Czechoslovakia banned nomadic life-style (Šlajchrt 1998) and the communist regime campaigned to turn the Roma into model citizens by employing them to achieve assimilation, and also providing them with places to live. Policies preventing nomadic lifestyle date back to the 1790s and the second wave of de-nomadization to the 1920s.

¹¹ The Czech Republic is not alone in seeking to integrate the Roma. The efforts are multifaceted, eloquently declared and goal-oriented, typically funded through EU funds provided specifically for that purpose. EU countries face similar problems when embracing integration. In addition to examples of good practices of enhancing Roma's chances of success in the majority society, Spain has been repeatedly cited as a model country systematically integrating the Roma (the second largest Roma minority in Europe of almost one million). The European Commission representing Spain, Bulgaria, Ireland and Greece launched an international network supporting lifelong learning of the Roma to display cases of successful school integration (European Commission 2012; Open Society Institute 2007). The project is backed up by research in socialization, education and community involvement, and contributes to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.

Neither the idea to teach Romani nor its use as a channel of cultivating a positive self-awareness was new to the Czech sociolinguistic space. Socialist schools recognized the presence of the Roma and planned to introduce Romani into the teaching process in the 1950s. In the 1960s, Hübschmannová (1976, 2002) argued for introducing Romani to schools at least in Slovakia, which has always had higher concentrations of Roma population, but this initiative was blocked by the process of assimilating the Roma, opposing their distinct identity and nationality, and viewing Romani as incapable of meeting speakers' needs, which discredited it at schools and marginalized it everywhere else (Nosková et al. 2011). In this way, the society manipulated the Roma into losing identity, self-confidence, and faith that one's tongue can represent and support speakers. For those reasons, the need to teach Romani in regular schools was the most urgent issue related to the Roma (Homolek 2003; Hübschmannová 2002: 68). Today, arguments for abandoning Romani appear to resonate with those who claim that instead of teaching Romani, Roma children should obligatorily attend kindergarten in order to learn Czech better and avoid school problems (cf. Šulová 2007; *Romské dítě* 'Roma Child' 2010).¹² The ombudsman for human rights endorsed the kindergarten strategy as a way to integrate the children socially rather than just to catch up with Czech but other political elites have delayed its onset (idnes.cz 2014).

The proposal of teaching Romani became a way to comply with ECRML whose signatories have been expected to protect minority cultures. Teaching Romani was also seen as a way to grant rights to the Roma although the proposal put their participation aside and missed a chance to frame Romani as a foreign language anyone could study. The 2009 report on applying ECRML evaluated Romani as a stigmatized language with a low prestige that has consequently undergone assimilation (*ECRML Application* 2009: 6).¹³ The situation of Romani was described as requiring "particularly resolute action... since ... virtually absent from public life, state education and the media, and suffers from considerable prejudice and hostility" (Council of Europe 2009: 10). Czech authorities were encouraged to adopt a structured approach to its promotion and maintenance, engage its speakers in the process (Council of Europe 2011), and train teachers in the methodology *Quality Education in Romani for Europe*.¹⁴ The methodology was targeted at sustaining Romani and teaching it to speakers of diverse ages and degrees of proficiency (levels A1 through B2) at primary and secondary schools in 2010 (Government 2013: 15). Despite teaching materials being developed, the plan to teach Romani has not been realized. As a consequence, the chance for Romani to overcome its status of a dominated language, to be rehabilitated as a language worthy of standardizing, acquire prestige among its speakers, and spread beyond its narrow range of usage was missed.¹⁵ At the time when Amnesty International started a litigation

¹² In commenting on Czech special education Šulová (2007: 14) writes that the main reason for poor performance of many Roma children at school is inadequate knowledge of Czech and often also Romani, which complicates communication with the teacher and other children.

¹³ Usage of Romani has recently declined on the periphery of Europe (Spain, Britain and Finland) and in central Europe (the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), in particular (<http://www.romea.cz/cz/kultura/romstina-dnes-slavi-svuj-mezinarodni-den>).

¹⁴ In 2010 European Center for Modern Languages at the Council of Europe partnered with the University of Graz and Charles University's Philosophical Faculty to develop the materials, available at <http://www.ecml.at/Aboutus/tabid/118/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>.

¹⁵ Although the Ministry of Education has proposed projects addressing inclusive education (supported by the Czech Academic Society of Inclusive Education), emancipation and integration the projects have encountered problems of inadequate teachers' preparation to deal with language variability, new approaches to teaching, and diversity of the classroom population.

against the Czech Republic due to continued exclusion of Roma children from the public school space,¹⁶ Czech political parties and schools reopened the discussion of introducing Romani to Czech schools (Government 2014 and 2014a; idnes.cz 2010 and 2014). However, in 2011 Romani was not taught at all due to a lack of textbooks, teachers, as well as low interest (Romea.cz 2011). By 2013 Romani was taught only at three high schools specializing in social work (Kubaník 2014).

Romani was proposed to be used both as an auxiliary and primary language in the Roma-only classrooms in order for children to overcome the language barriers in the initial grades, render education accessible to all, and minimize the number of children transferred to practical schools.¹⁷ The Ministry of Education emphasized the necessity to motivate Roma children so that they gradually adapt to the prevalent Czech language culture and thus integrate to the educational mainstream (Rozhlas.cz 2014) but refused the proposal of teaching Roma children in both languages and labeled it as counterproductive and segregating (Romea.cz 2014). Both the fact that dominant language speakers protested against attempts to legitimize a minority language rather than the dominated speakers having protested their discrimination and the fact that Romani speakers refrained from an active participation in the dilemma bring up serious problems. Not only the non-Roma but also the Roma do not perceive Romani as a *real* language but a jargon of practical family communication that continues to be useful within kinship networks and, in particular, to reach the elderly.

3.2 Ideology of standard Czech

Standard languages are elaborated variants one has to study in order to master them. Typically they represent agreement among speakers of dialects, interdialects, and ethnolects about a neutral variety representing them officially. Standards are products of literary traditions and purposeful cultivation carried out to ensure their stability as well as dynamicity (Nekvapil 2007). Milroy (2001: 530) puts forth the notion that standardization imposes uniformity upon a class of subjects. The standard of Czech is an abstracted and idealized variant maintained so as to reveal its historical basis even at the expense of distancing itself increasingly from spoken and common Czech (Eckert 1993; Townsend 1990) and to cultivate its homogeneity. The ideology of the standard and the speakers' assumption that it is the correct variant of Czech have impacted attitudes towards Romani, blocked it from gaining visibility and accessing additional domains of usage, and provided space for an asymmetrical treatment of the languages in contact and their planning. As Hübschmannová (1999: 1) suggests, the Roma problem has been a problem of the non-Roma unable to communicate with the Roma who have already been disadvantaged when expected to adopt Czech communicative strategies even if they did not speak Czech well or spoke its ethnolect (see also Holomek 2003). The fact that non-Roma speakers are exposed to the standard Czech of the media and educational materials since early childhood (although they gradually learn to use it actively only in

¹⁶ The pre-litigation mechanism (announced in September 2014) enables the European Commission to hold the Czech government accountable for, and publicly and politically put pressure on it to end, the ongoing, systemic and unlawful practice of discrimination against Romani children in Czech schools. The Commission calls into question the Czech Republic's compliance with Article 21/1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU prohibiting discrimination based on any ground such as race or ethnic origin, and the Race Equality Directive Articles prohibiting discrimination in access to education on the grounds of race or ethnicity (<http://www.refworld.org/country/CZE542515e84,0.html>).

¹⁷ Creating separate Roma classrooms at schools would, however, block integrative learning and advance segregation, due to which Czech schools have been repeatedly criticized (Rozhlas.cz 2014).

appropriate formal settings and continue using the common Czech interdialect in daily communication) gives them an advantage during school socialization (cf. Bermel 2010: 12). The sociolinguistic spaces of the Roma are delineated by vernaculars and dissociation among Roma clans, and expressed along dialectal boundaries. This sort of language variation goes against the ideology of standard cultures that are carried via national languages and function as ties among speakers of vernaculars. However, to engage speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds in the classroom one must understand language as variable and dynamic rather than dependent on standard and prescriptive grammar rules (cf. Orzulak 2013).

I propose that current ideologies shaping speakers' assumptions, usages, and behaviors in the Czech space are that of (1) standard [*spisovná*] Czech as the correct variety that represents all Czechs; (2) the dominant vs. subordinated languages, i.e., standard Czech vs. nonstandard dialects and minority languages¹⁸; (3) the country's perception of cultural homogeneity and national integrity; and (4) Romani as a non-language and a hybrid ethnolect. However, Romani has been also ideologized as an endangered minority language through the EU discourse of language protection and revitalization. The Czech initiative of teaching Romani has been consequently estranged from its context. On the one hand, speakers perceive standard Czech as the language that is grammatically correct, and thus suitable for official discourse, school teaching, and the media, despite the fact that its codification has conserved phonological, syntactic and lexical archaisms, long abandoned in its spoken variants (Bermel 2010: 11). Romani, on the other hand, is viewed as a substandard dialect that does not belong in public spaces or school curricula.

Research into the standard and its cultivation has been entrusted to the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Czech Language that publishes a dictionary and rules of standard Czech orthography, monitors and interprets variation in the standard, and provides guidance on its usage in the form of updates on prescriptive rules.¹⁹ The rather conservative Czech public leans onto this tradition and is hesitant to accept codification revisions.²⁰ Maintaining the status and ideology of standard Czech has been demanding and contentious since it is continually contested by common (spoken) Czech. An alternative approach to the current ideology of standard Czech was proposed by Nekvapil (2007: 297), i.e., that the Czech standard can better render variability of Czech and become more accessible to its speakers, among them the Roma, were it to incorporate some of the features of social and territorial dialects. Adopting such an approach in the Czech space any time soon is, however, unlikely since the public supports exclusive values of the standard such as nuanced expression, complex grammar and spelling rules, and beauty that stems from that rather than efficiency and convenience of expression (quotes from the daily *Mladá fronta* 'Young Front' [2008],

¹⁸ Bermel (2010: 5) evaluates the current Czech language situation as post-diglossic since many of the beliefs and attitudes associated with diglossia persist in the Czech environment but the actual usage exhibits diglossia in only a few diglossic sociolinguistic situations.

¹⁹ Changes in the norm have been deliberate and slow; the most recent codification that included any significant modifications dates back to 1993 (regularly updated at <http://prirucka.ujc.cas.cz/?id=890>). The last codification was published in 1993 and its supplement in 2014.

²⁰ Cvrček (2006: 19-20) points out that codification follows the contrastive principle and focuses mainly at usages in which speakers typically make mistakes since language features they acquired naturally are often in conflict with those formally learned. Codification regulates differences between the spoken norm and literary standard through explicit prohibitions and prescriptions, and provides reasons for codifying features that had earlier belonged only to the spoken variant.

cited in Bermel 2010: 27). Bermel (2010: 11) draws attention to the fact that standardization in some way happens in most literate cultures, and in the Czech lands standard Czech is undisputedly the most prestigious variant whose usage is highly desirable at schools and universities. In contrast to that, speakers typically project negative attitudes towards common Czech and see it as a lower grade variant (or *pokleslá čeština*). Standard language ideology, although confronted by the presence of minority languages, has had the power to drive the public (Milroy 2001: 538). As the protagonist of the standard culture, the Czech public is entitled to its values and prestige at the expense of minorities that are expected to follow the regime.²¹

4 Planning Romani

4.1 Standardization

The standard Czech culture and ideology provide an ambiguous support to teaching Romani and to an institutional change. The fact that Romani lacks a standard (except that of orthography, as discussed in Hübschmanová and Šebková [2003]) and that its speakers do not agree on a standard to unify them delays the actual teaching as well. (Hübschmannová and Neustupný [1996] emphasized the need to create the standard; in 2006, it was created in Slovakia on the basis of Slovak Romani north-central dialects brought to Bohemia with the migrating Roma and spoken today by the majority). Slovak and Vlach Romani, the two variants of almost all Czech Roma are mutually incomprehensible for many Roma speakers and maintained to different degrees. The majority of proficient adult speakers belong to the Vlach Roma who maintain Romani the best but represent a minority, cultivate an exclusive self-identity, and refuse to accept the written standard that is distant from the way they speak (For the differences in the extent of dialectal usage, see Červenka et al. [2011]).²² Hübschmanová (2004) drew attention to the chance of standardizing Romani through the channel of Romani literature by disseminating texts in standardized orthography that could be shared despite dialectal differentiation. Sadílková (2011) stressed that Romani is the channel of adequate expression for the authentic Roma literature and suggested the Internet as its platform.²³ Roma writing has thus received a limited presence at the Czech literary forum (Kramářová and Sadílková 2007; Sadílková 2006), although the majority society continues to be surprised by its existence (cf. Eckertová 2014).

Hübschmannová and Neustupný (1996: 103-104) considered the phenomenon of semi-communication as a viable strategy through which to train speakers of cognate languages (such as those of Romani dialects) to communicate by using their own language. They also proposed training speakers to accept variation and learn to deal with it, and creating a Romani standard using a variety of features of different dialects rather than selecting one of them as

²¹ In referring to various scholarly traditions Gal (2006: 164) notes that “participation in a regime of standardization ... requires exhibiting loyalty towards a standard variety whose high status is supported by centralizing institutions of education, labour markets, mass media and government bureaucracies that inculcate in the population a respect and desire for such linguistic forms”. Kroskrity (2004: 503) writes that standard language is presented as the universally available and only resource permitting all speakers’ full participation.

²² Standard Slovak Romani follows morphophonemic spelling, which provides the broadest transcription and thus the one most widely applicable, as opposed to a phonemic or phonetic one.

²³ Romani underwent revival in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s when Romani literature first appeared in print through the initiative of Milena Hübschmannová who also established the Roma Studies Department at Charles University in 1991.

the standard. At this point, the authority of the standard continues to block the teaching of Romani as if it were undermining the status of standard Czech. Without mastering this standard the Roma are not given access to the sociolinguistic space of the Czech majority and its social networks. Yet, it is precisely the opportunities to diversify speakers' networks on both sides of the spectrum that would endorse integration and indirectly raise the status of Romani. Romani will have a better chance of being accepted as a language that could be taught and learned. This can happen when standard Czech ceases to be perceived as the only correct and grammatical variant of Czech, the institutions and speakers shift their focus to language variation, and the value of home language and preservation of cultural and functional diversity is reinforced (McBee Orzulak 2013). Only then can semi-communication (*intércomprehension* in Grin [2008]; receptive multilingualism in Nábělková [2008]) be endorsed (Haugen 1981). However, it seems premature to expect Czech schools and teachers to diversify the ways languages are taught any time soon.

Elšík (2003) has explained the complexity of the current dialectal profile of the Roma in the Czech Republic in comparison with Slovakia and provided reasons for the belated development of a Romani interdialect as a lingua franca. He classifies Czech Romani as a displaced areal dialect rather than an insular dialect and stresses that Czech-based Romani is a long-distance transplanted dialect gradually adopting Czech as its matrix language and developing an interdialect with a Czech grammatical base and Romani-derived lexicon due to “internal disintegration and an ongoing external integration of the communities of today’s Czech Central Roma” (Elšík 2003: 44, 56, 58). It remains to be tested whether Romani dialects shifted in the direction of conversion into a spoken standard or interdialect over the past twelve years. Research in Romani maintenance and usage experimenting with teaching Romani at selected locations (Červenka et al. 2010: 43) concluded that dialectal variation did not cause miscomprehension (due also to intermarriages among Roma subethnic groups in larger Czech cities) and endorsed teaching speakers the strategies of intra-comprehension, which would be a step towards modernizing the traditional curriculum of language studies. However, a local standard cannot develop until power structures in politics and economy are established for the standard to enter (Halwachs: 1). Piller (2011: 141) stresses that plans of integration can achieve their presumed goal only if undergirded by industrial policies that allow for work to be the foundation of social inclusion and justice. As recent political discussions reviving the implementation of Romani at schools—at the same time revealing inadequate resources at all levels—show, the Czech space has not prepared the grounds for any sort of public presence of Romani or simplified its access to institutional structures. Government (2009) and other official documents admitted that Roma cultural identity cannot stabilize until “Czechs change their attitudes”.

In the European context Romani has entered the stage of developing a supranational standard (to be learned aside with local dialects) through the gradual functional expansion of its domains and lexicon (Halwachs: 3). Hancock (2007-2008) proposed specific steps in implementing an international written standard. If a Czech Romani standard is to be developed it should happen in contact with the European standard. Friedman (2002: 26) examined Romani standardization from the points of view of legal status, language planning, and language maintenance, noting that “the symbolic or emblematic function plays a crucial role to such an extent that even the naming of Romani can have the effect of encouraging its

use in broader domains (as in Macedonia) or restricting which variety will be encouraged (as in Germany and Austria)”²⁴

5 Romani as a minority language

It is apparent that the small number and the dispersion of sizeable Roma settlements present a challenge to language teaching and maintenance (Council of Europe 2009: 8) and hinder the legal application of the right to have education provided in the language of the minority.²⁵ These facts, however, contribute to Romani’s endangerment that was first described in the 1970s (Hübschmannová 1976) and confirmed by the recent field research (Červenka et al. 2009 and 2010). Data of the most recent research show that there were roughly 30% of speakers and 30% of non-speakers among children of school age, and most Roma over the age of 35 spoke Romani fluently. The research also evaluated the extent to which Romani, Czech, and Slovak were used in Roma families, the range of communicative situations covered by Romani, local support given to teaching Romani by schools and parents, and availability of teaching materials. The Council of Europe (2011: 18) has called on the Czech authorities to engage in promoting awareness and tolerance of all minority languages in the country, and to ensure that Roma children were not discouraged from speaking their language at school (romea.cz 2014).

Although Kubaník et al. (2010: 27, 38) notes that one’s competence in Romani may grow over one’s life in relation to exposure or pressure coming from influential individuals in the community, the Roma speak Czech better with each passing generation (Kubaník 2014). Bořkovcová (2006: 113) comments that the young have tended to be more fluent in Czech but less careful about following the standard than their parents and grandparents. The communist policy of assimilation has induced a language shift, destabilized the sociolinguistic and cultural status of Romani in families and communities, and expedited their transformation. Resettlement practices encouraged Roma mobility through the socialist networks of housing, work and school in which Romani became an attribute of those “difficult to assimilate”. The social discomfort associated with using it in public was conducive to speakers’ distancing themselves from the community, which prevented daily cultural operations of maintaining shared history. The process of language loss has been accelerated by parents following the

²⁴ In commenting on the Roma situation in Macedonia, Friedman (2002) noted that success of the Roma integration and the majority dialect standardization (Arlj dialect spoken around Skopje) was predetermined by the Roma’s language rights in administration, education, culture and the judiciary guaranteed by Macedonian constitution and claimed politically in 1992 by Democratic Progressive Party of the Roma. The government has also been politically motivated to support ethnic and linguistic identity of the Roma in order to offset the pressure of religious and subsequently linguistic assimilation with Albanian and Turkish through the channel of Islam. The current status of Romani in the Republic of Macedonia has considerably advanced in terms of both status and corpus planning. Although variants continue to compete in some areas of orthography, grammar, and lexicon, consensus and consistency have gradually emerged with Arlj at its grammatical and lexical basis (Juzup and Kepeski 1980). But the position of Romani was de facto accepted as equal to Macedonian already in 1936 when Trajko Petrovski translated to Romani a collection of poems by Koco Racin, a famous Macedonian poet. The Macedonian language was recognized as an official language only eight years before that. By this act Petrovski positioned Romani as an oppressed language striving for recognition vis-à-vis Macedonian (Friedman 2002: 13). Although the unity of the basic lexicon and inflectional system of Romani justifies a unified linguistic treatment, the combination of territorial dispersal and dialectal differentiation necessitates local and regional solutions to common problems (Friedman 2002: 26).

²⁵ The school law stipulates providing local education in the language of the minority as long as 10% of the local population declares their nationality as different from Czech or Moravian (<http://www.czechkid.cz/si1190.html>).

school advice to not overload children and not speak Romani to them (Červenka et al. 2009; Hübschmannová 2002). Consequently, the parents have erred on the side of children's school socialization, avoided Romani or the ethnolect due to the social stigma and an inevitable demise, expressing but a lukewarm interest in children taking Romani to school. This has consequently exposed the Roma as a vulnerable ethnicity. The opinion that Czech is at stake rather than Romani and that the Roma should be required to attend the last kindergarten year to learn it properly and thus minimize the Roma "handicap" prevails (*Romské dítě* 'The Roma Child' 2010). However, false myths of verbal deprivation that historically lead to attempts to fix students' "deficits" in the standard language rather than recognize a systemic nature of stigmatized varieties were pointed out decades ago (Labov 1969). The myth of verbal deprivation addressing language acquisition of children growing up in "socially weak or uninspiring environments" is common (cf. Demetrová 2011).

The goals of Romani teaching should be expanded into promoting bilingualism. However, bilingualism presumes sharing power and space, makes the presence of foreigners and minorities real, and disempowers the standard by accepting the existence of other grammars and conceptual frameworks. At this point, schools are not prepared to recognize children's accessing two linguistic repertoires in a complementary way and code-switching as a natural communicative strategy (Červenka et al. 2010: 47).²⁶ For now, pragmalinguistic competence in Romani as an alternate way of communicating, engaging in conversations, presenting arguments, defending one's opinions, being polite or impolite, and other linguistic behaviors is marginalized and the success of raising awareness among the Czech public about the value of Romani and bilingualism in Czech and Romani remains uncertain (Červenka et al. 2010: 46-48).²⁷

Without speakers' motivation to learn Romani in order to strengthen their cultural self-recognition, the Roma will lose both language and culture but "remain a visible minority without a cultural refuge and subject to discrimination" (Ian Hancock's [2014] informal comments). Without the support by Roma activists, ideological transformation from cultural homogeneity to heterogeneity and an attitudinal shift on minority languages, standard Czech will dominate the space, the Roma will remain on the periphery as a socio-economically supported minority, and the Czech Republic stand passive in the center of criticism for treating Romani with prejudice and hostility.²⁸ The current socio-economic situation of the Roma has declined to the degree that it disables their functioning among the majority and reduces opportunities to integrate. Over the last five years, political effort on behalf of the Roma has promoted their emancipation, inclusive education, and social integration. Considerable attention has been centered on educating Roma and non-Roma parents and

²⁶ Outcomes of a comparable classroom conflict, i.e., that of standard American and Afro-American English thus appear relevant to the Czech sociolinguistic space; to minimize the conflict, professionals resolved to accommodate AAE speakers, required schools to acknowledge not only ethnic but also linguistic variation and develop ways of teaching so that accessible to all speakers.

²⁷ Sloboda (2010: 13) notes that multicultural education projects have been typically constructed hierarchically with the majority culture on the top.

²⁸ "Affirmation of cultural identity of the Roma presupposes an attitudinal shift and openness of the Czech society so that the Roma feel as its full members, despite their cultural differences. However, the present problems are the distance from the Roma and negative attitudes of Czechs towards this national minority, assimilation pressure and ethnic identity suppression. The government strives to change these negative attitudes and form a multicultural society that profits from cultural diversity respecting identity of the Roma national minority manifested in their own culture, traditions and language" (Koncepce 2009: 15).

teachers so that they overcome the “language barrier” and the so-called “Roma problem”. However, the ethnic and social conflict will continue to escalate in relation to delaying the application of institutional strategies. This could directly impact the function of Romani as the symbol of ethnic identity of the young who are also growing aware of Czech being an allusive means of social advancement (Bořkovicová 2006: 25, 113).

6 Roma identity, community, ethnicity and nationality

A minority language is a strong marker of identity. In the Czech space Romani is even stronger as a marker since non-Roma Czechs do not study or learn Romani unless they have a special motivation to do so. Romani serves mostly as a language with a symbolic value and a code of internal communication. Research into awareness of one’s identity and language as a link to it could be accomplished, for instance, among institutionally raised Roma children who maintain ties to their biological families. When the Roma cross the ethnic boundary through intermarriage they adopt Czech as the family code, and use both the marriage and Czech as the means to achieve integration. In such marriages, the children are raised monolingual in Czech.²⁹ The language and culture practices are maintained only among the Vlach Roma traditional communities (Červenka et al. 2011). The fieldwork also revealed that some Roma saw Romani as an identity attribute and were ashamed of not speaking it while others considered Romani an obstacle to successful school socialization and social mobility. Some Roma perceived speaking Czech fluently as a way to shake off Roma identity while others learned Romani to discover it (Červenka et al. 2009). However, an individual with multiple identities stands out in the Czech space that promotes cultural and linguistic integrity and discourages multiple identities. The Roma agree that being Roma has a personal and local value but do not claim a Roma nationality as an official badge (in the recent census only 5% to 10% designated themselves unilaterally as Roma by nationality).³⁰ While choosing a nationality may be seen as a public gesture, choosing an identity is a personal decision. Giving up Romani due to its perception as a useless skill affects negatively the individual and the ethnic group that loses a critical strain of its existence. For that to be reversed Romani must regain a respectable public status couched not only in the context of minority languages’ rehabilitation across Europe and encouragement of pan-European Roma identity but also in local practices.

7 Conclusion: Predicting Romani’s future

A language refers to its sociocultural context reproducing culture through the practice of behaviors, rituals, and narratives but for the Roma culture to be reproduced it must first be revitalized.³¹ School segregation has created a population layer incapable of functioning on

²⁹ Regardless of their upbringing, Roma children adopted by “white” families or those raised institutionally (euphemized as “coconuts”, i.e., children of dark skin but white values) continue to be Roma since judged by external appearance.

³⁰ Outside of the official census, data collected from Roma media and an analysis of articles published in *Romano hangos* ‘The Roma voice’ between 1999 and 2007 demonstrate the Roma have presented themselves as a unified minority and nationality sharing a history and cultural values, despite diverse ethnic groupings (Badáňová 2010: 55).

³¹ Lewis et al. (2014) places two Romani dialects spoken in the Czech Republic on the scale of interrupted language transmission (Scale from 1 to 10), i.e., Carpathian Romani spoken by 40,400 according to the rather unreliable data of the 2011 census and having Status 5 (Developing); and Sinte Romani spoken by 5,100 having Status 5 (Developing) as well. Status 5 means that the language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some.

par with the majority society and rendered the Roma undereducated by moving them through the parallel educational track of special/practical schools.³² In today's Czech sociolinguistic space, the Roma have no political representation (Minorities 2003; see also Government 2014). Among the challenges of European multilingualism Schjerve and Vetter (2012) placed emphasis on enlarging the pool of school-taught foreign languages to include those of minorities and on knowing "two plus one [foreign plus home]" languages. The Czech Ministry of Education prescribed the study of two foreign languages at school as of fall 2013 selected from among standard vehicular languages that help achieve one's professional or social goals. The legislation failed to take advantage of local minority and neighboring languages and thus broaden language choice (cf. Vasiljev 2013). If a European-based Romani standard develops, Romani would gain a better chance to enter the Czech curriculum.

The study sought to reveal the sociolinguistic complexity of Romani subsisting in the Czech sociolinguistic space. Relevant factors predicting outcomes for Romani are the potential for its alignment with power and institutional endorsement of the practice of bilingualism. Could such language planning ever change the public reception of multilingualism and thereby the Czech sociolinguistic space? A potential transformation of the homogeneous Czech identity into a pluralistic one is uncertain due to the current instability generated by the economic crisis, among others. The main issue for the majority society is to lift the stigma from Romani and attach a positive value to it so that its cultural resignification can be conducive to the overall resignification of the Roma. Providing space to the Roma means not excluding them from the Czech sociolinguistic space as an "alien, deviant and unadaptable group that lacks a proper economic function" (Toušek 2011: 20). The Roma will not resume speaking Romani unless they have practical reasons to do so but may instead build an interdialect while protesting their socio-economic conditions (in the absence of measures reversing their general downfall). The rise in interethnic conflict in the Czech Republic and recent anti-Romani demonstrations in several localities have already set up grounds to explore this hypothesis (Government 2014). Thus, emancipation, social integration, and inclusive education cannot be accomplished if Romani is left to dissipate and its power to stimulate a social change remains muted. If the Roma are de-ethnicized to the extent of losing both language and culture, they will still be a visible minority and subject to discrimination, but will have no Romani world in which to find refuge or comfort.

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³² Practical schools are not to be substituted for vocational schools, nor do they emulate their mission.

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