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Romani in Contact

The History, Structure and Sociology of a Language

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ROMANI STANDARDIZATION AND STATUS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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0. Introduction

Romani is one of the few widely-spoken languages of Europe for which basic issues of standardization (orthography, dialectal base, etc.) are in the process of resolution. In Haugen’s (1966:16-26) terms, Romani is at the stage of selection of a norm. Due to the fact that the Roms are a transnational people, problems of language planning are additionally complicated by the fact that they are being confronted in the frameworks of various and varying state mechanisms. For the Roms of the Republic of Macedonia, issues of identity maintenance and sociopolitical integration must be viewed in the context of an educational policy that has included multilingualism for the past half century in a state that has only recently achieved independence and is surrounded by overt and covert threats to its integrity. This paper will examine a specific event in the current efforts to standardize Romani, namely a conference held in Skopje, Macedonia on November 20-21, 1992, and the document that resulted from it. The document itself will be presented together with commentary on its context significance.

1. Macedonia, standardization efforts, and Romani

Macedonia has served as the site for a number of important events in the standardization of three languages of the region, e.g. the Macedonian codification conferences of Skopje in 1944-45, the Albanian Alphabet Conference of Bitola (Manastir) in 1908, and the publication of the Romani grammar by Jusuf and Kepeski (1980). For Macedonian, the results of the first codification conference of November-December 1944 were not accepted by the government for a variety of reasons, and attempts to rehabilitate it in the early 1990’s were based on party politics. But the basic rules of orthography and morphology were established in May, 1945 (see Friedman
1993). In the case of Albanian, later events in Albania and Kosovia - particularly the literary language unification of 1968-72 - have surpassed the 1908 Conference in overall effect, although the Alphabet Congress itself is enshrined as a crucial step in the establishment of modern standard Albanian (see Skendi 1967:366-90, Byron 1985). In the case of Romani, Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) can be compared to Pulevski (1 1880), which was an attempt at a Macedonian grammar that is seminal in its signaling of ethnic and linguistic consciousness but not sufficiently elaborated to serve as a codification. The language resolutions adopted at the Fourth World Romani Congress held in Warsaw in 1990 (Cortiade et al. 1991) may become the watershed event in the normativization of Standard Romani, but it is too early to judge.

In the past decade or so, there has been an upsurge in activity related to the use of Romani as a means or subject of education. This is especially true in Eastern Europe, where these efforts have occurred in the context of the region’s general sociopolitical upheaval that has its origins in the early eighties and broke the threshold of stability at the end of that decade. One of the results of these events has been a new focus on the situation of Romani as a language of literacy in Macedonia, where the Roms are a constitutionally recognized nationality and constitute 3% of the population (60,000) according to Pulevski (1 179 1981). In the case of Albanian, later events in Albania and Kosovia - particularly the Macedonian language unification of 1968-72 - have surpassed the 1908 Conference in overall effect, although the Alphabet Congress itself is enshrined as a crucial step in the establishment of modern standard Albanian (see Skendi 1967:366-90, Byron 1985). In the case of Romani, Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) can be compared to Pulevski (1 1880), which was an attempt at a Macedonian grammar that is seminal in its signaling of ethnic and linguistic consciousness but not sufficiently elaborated to serve as a codification. The language resolutions adopted at the Fourth World Romani Congress held in Warsaw in 1990 (Cortiade et al. 1991) may become the watershed event in the normativization of Standard Romani, but it is too early to judge.

...
**Emancipacija na Romite na Makedonija** or PCER had at this time one representative in parliament, Faik Abdi. During 1992, a second party, the Democratic Progressive Party of the Roms, split from PCER over various issues, including questions of language standardization, dialectal compromise and the place of Romani in educational institutions (*Nova Makedonija* 21.X.1992:4). It was in this context that the November 1992 conference took place. Although representatives of different sides of Romani politics were present, the conference itself was kept apart from partisan considerations. Nonetheless, the document that resulted from these deliberations, reproduced here in English translation with additional commentary in square brackets, was agreed upon by representatives of the various political currents as well as by the intellectuals that produced it. The document addresses a number of general and specific issues in Romani language standardization and should be viewed in the context of Jusuf and Kepeski (1980), Kenrick (1981), and Cortiade et al. (1991). As indicated above, both Jusuf and Kenrick were present at the conference. Moreover, both Jusuf and Kenrick participated in the deliberations of the Language Commission at the Fourth World Romani Congress, at which Cortiade et al. (1991) was discussed and signed. Jusuf was a signatory to that document, but Kenrick was not. Mention should also be made here of Hancock (1975, 1993), which, while important for the history of Romani standardization, did not have a direct bearing on the 1992 conference. The former had been superseded by subsequent publications and events while the latter had not yet appeared.

### 3. The 1992 Romani Standardization Document: text and commentary

#### 'GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. This codification is for the Romani language as a course of study in the Republic of Macedonia. This codification is viewed as a necessary step toward the international Romani literary language and not in competition with it.’

   This statement was intended to address Cortiade et al. (1991). The Romani participants in the conference felt that the situation in Macedonia required a regional standard for use in Macedonian elementary schools, with a view to study of the international standard later. See also comments on the Alphabet.

   ‘2. In view of the fact that the majority of Roms in the Republic of Macedonia use the Arlija dialect, this dialect shall serve as the basis of the Romani literary language in the Republic of Macedonia, but with certain grammatical, phonological, and especially lexical additions (and modifications) from all the Romani dialects of the Republic of Macedonia such as Džambaz, Burgudži, Gurbet, and others.’

   Throughout the history of Romani standardization efforts in Macedonia, Arlija has served as the basis, but, as indicated above, this question had become a politically divisive issue. This compromise was satisfactory to all present at the conference.

#### 'ALPHABET

The Romani alphabet in the Republic of Macedonia consists of the following letters in Latin transcription. The corresponding Macedonian orthography is used for Cyrillic.

Aa, Bb, Cc, Čć, Č/]č, Dd, Dž/dž, Ee, Ff, Gg, Hh, Ii, Jj, Kk, Kh/kh, Ll, Mm, Nn, Oo, Pp, Ph/ph, Rr, Ss, Šš, Tt, Th/th, Uu, Vv, Žž'

The corresponding Cyrillic alphabet would be the following (the order follows that of the Latin alphabet):

Aа, Бб, Ћћ, Чч, Чх/чх, Дд, Ђђ, Ее, Фф, Гг, Хх, Іі, Јј, Кк, Кх/кх, Лл, Мм, Нн, Оо, Пп, Пх/пх, Рр, Сс, Шш, Тт, Тх/тх, Ўу, Вв, 33، Жж

Most of the differences between this alphabet and those proposed in previous works are treated below. Three salient issues not addressed otherwise are the indication of unpredictable stress by means of a grave accent, the use of the acute instead of the haček (Romani ćiriklo) to mark palatals and the use of a special symbol 3 for the voiced palatal affricate (fricative in some dialects) all in Cortiade et al. (1991). The issue of marking stress is not addressed here. Apparently the participants did not feel it was an issue. The use of the haček instead of the acute for strident palatals is well established both in East European orthographies and in linguistic transcriptions, as well as in many Romani publications, including both Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) and Kenrick (1981). Despite the fact that a number of publications have appeared in the orthography of Cortiade et al. (1991), the participants in the conference preferred to follow the type of practice currently use in Macedonia and elsewhere (e.g. Petrovski 1992, Hũbschmannova 1991 et al.). The same attitude dictated the use of Đž instead of 3. The fact that the acute is used for mellow palatals in East European languages that are in
contact with Romani, e.g. Serbo-Croatian and Polish, was also felt to favor
the use of the hacheck for strident palatals for Romani in Macedonia.

The situation can be compared to that of the Albanian alphabet congress
of 1908. The crucial decision of that congress was the adoption of the
principle that Albanian would be written in a Latin alphabet rather than Arabic
or Greek, although the two major Latin alphabets then in use— one based on
the principle of one letter per sound the other using digraphs— were both
dorsed. Eventually a single alphabet became official. Similarly, while most
Roms agree that the alphabet used for Romani should be Latin (the mention
of Cyrillic is simply for contexts where transliteration of individual items
might be desirable in Macedonia, as opposed to the exclusive use of Cyrillic
in Mahkov 1992), there is not yet a general consensus concerning the details
of orthography. See especially points 4 though 8 below.

'COMMENTARY
In some Romani dialects, the uvular fricative /x/ is distinguished from the
glottal aspirate /h/ and/or the rolled /r/ is distinguished from another related
type of sonorant, but in view of the fact that such distinctions are not made in
the Arlija dialect special letters [for these distinctions] have not been introduced
into the alphabet. Such pronunciations are permitted as literary for
those speakers who have such distinctions in their native dialects.’

These are two major contested issues. Jusuf and Kepeski (1980),
Kenrick (1981) and Cortiade et al. (1991) all prescribe a graphic distinction
for /x/ and /h/, but Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) fail to make the distinction in
practice, using both <xx> and <h> in the same roots, e.g. xiv, hiv “hole”, xor
“depth” but horodaripe “deepening’, an illustration of the problem that would
be encountered by speakers of dialects without the distinction. Given that
minimal pairs are extremely rare and that the sounds themselves are in free
variation in dialects where they are not phonemic, the majority of Roms at the
meeting felt that a single grapheme should be used. In the case of the two
types of /l/, Cortiade et al. (1991) makes the distinction facultative while both
Kenrick (1981) and Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) give only one /r/ in their
standard orthographies.

'BASIC ORTHOGRAPHIC, MORPHOLOGICAL AND
MORPHOPHONOLOGICAL RULES
1. There is no special sign for the so-called dark vowel (schwa) in the
alphabet because the vowel is very rare, marginal, or entirely absent in most
Romani dialects. In the rare instances of schwa in the Arlija dialect, the
corresponding form in DZambaz or some other Romani dialect with a
different vowel’ will be taken as the literary norm, e.g. instead of Arlija
virdon [“wagon”] DZambaz vurdon is accepted.

Schwa is of foreign origin in Romani and only occurs in dialects
influenced by contact with languages where schwa is phonemic. Its
occurrence is generally limited to borrowings from those languages. Thus,
for example, in Jusuf and Kepeski’s (1980) vocabulary of 2,292 entries,
only 31 items, representing at most 21 roots, contain schwa. Although Jusuf
and Kepeski (1980) use the sign <a> for schwa, Kenrick (1981) and Cortiade et al. (1991) both exclude it as dialectal. In view of the fact that
many occurrences of schwa in one dialect correspond to some other vowel
in another dialect, this was viewed as a good opportunity for expanding the
vocabulary of standardized Macedonian Romani beyond the limits of the
Arlija dialect.

2. Where there is aspiration in the root of a word, it will always be written,
e.g. jnkh [“eye”].

Although some dialects have despiration of underlying aspirates in
some positions, the adoption of the morphophonemic principle of
representing the underlying morphophoneme in spelling which is common to
many of the languages of Eastern Europe was adopted.

3. Automatic devoicing is not spelled at the end of a word, e.g. dad
[“father”].

Same as point 2 above.

4. Where an underlying dental or velar slop or sonorant occurs before a
front vowel or jot, i.e. t, d, k, g, 1, n plus i, e, j, the underlying consonant is
used in spelling, e.g. buti [“work”], kerdjum [“I did”], geljum [“I went”], lil
[“letter”], pani [“water”].

This is an area of both considerable and salient dialectal variation
and morphophonemic alternation in Romani. Underlying or historical dental
and/or velar stops in these positions can be pronounced as palatals and/or
with affricated or fricativized articulation in various dialects of Macedonia and
elsewhere (see Vcntcel’ and Cerenkov 1976 for details), e.g. Arlija buti,
DZambaz buki, Burgudzi buci, Gurbet buci; singular buzli plural buka, etc.
Similarly, /l/ and /r/ can become palatals or lost, e.g. Arlija pani but DZambaz
paj (< *pani). Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) show considerable variation, e.g.
writing both <k> and <k>, <l> and <ll>, etc. before front vowels in the
same lexical items at different occurrences. Cortiade et al. (1991) articulates
this same principle for velars, but has special graphic symbols for alternating dentals and velars in their function as case markers (also called postpositions, see Friedman 1991), viz. ð and q, respectively. Thus in the orthography of Cortiade et al. (1991) the same morphophonemic alternations have different spellings, while the same graphic symbols have different pronunciations, as illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cortiade et al. (1991)</th>
<th>1992 Macedonian Conference</th>
<th>dialectal pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rom (loc. sg.)</td>
<td>Romesce</td>
<td>[romeste] [romesde]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom (loc. pl.)</td>
<td>Romendue</td>
<td>[romende] [romende]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom (abl. sg.)</td>
<td>Romestar</td>
<td>[romestar]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom (abl. pl.)</td>
<td>Romestar</td>
<td>[romendar]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom (dat. sg.)</td>
<td>Romesce</td>
<td>[romese] [romeske]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom (dat. pl.)</td>
<td>Romendat</td>
<td>[romendat]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>done (m, sg., pt.)</td>
<td>kerde</td>
<td>[derdo] [kerdo]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>done (pl. pt.)</td>
<td>kerde</td>
<td>[cerde] [kerde]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has also been confusion in prepositions and adverbs, e.g. and-o “in the” (Cortiade et al. 1991) but and-o “in the” andoro “inside” (Sarău 1992).

It is important to emphasize that in the various dialects of Romani the same phonological changes that affect the dental case endings also affect the dental participal marker, and, similarly, the same processes affect velars before front vowels in both roots and grammatical endings in those dialects with fronting of velars. To this can be added the fact that voicing is distinctive. The Roms present at the 1992 meeting were unanimous in their decision to follow morphophonemic practice and spelling using underlying consonants. Cf. comments on the alphabet above.

5. In writing the first person singular aorist the final consonant is preserved according to the root, e.g. kerdo [“done”] > kerدم [“I did”].

This is a specific example of point 4, but at the same time it specifies the Arlija form of the first singular aorist, which can also be -en or -om, with or without jotation, and is a salient dialectal feature, i.e. one which is taken by speakers themselves as indicative of dialectal affiliation. In Cortiade et al. (1991), a hačk is used over a vowel that follows a consonant that is jotted in some dialects but not in others (except in case suffixes, see point 4), e.g. kerdəm.

6. Where there is jotation, it is written with j; the letter i is only written as a vowel:

Romni, Romnie, Romnjia, Romnjatar, etc. [“nom. sg., voc. sg., nom. pl, abl. pl.”]

Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) are inconsistent in writing <i> for <j> in final position in some words, e.g. šai/sai “it is possible”, múj/mui “mouth”.

Similarly, there has been variation in the spelling of feminine obliques under the influence of the nominative e.g. abl. Romniatar/Romnjatar for [romnjatar]. Given that /j/ can contrast with /y/ as indicated in the vocative singular and nominative plural forms of Romni “(Romani) woman, wife” cited here, it was agreed that there was a basis for a consistent distinction. See also point 5 above.

7. In suffixes where Džamža and other dialects preserve an older s which has been lost in Arlija, s is written: devles, devlesa, [“god” acc, sg., instr. sg., manges, mangesa, mangas, mangesal “want”, 2 sg. short/long, 1 pl. short/long].

Jusuf and Kepeski (1980) do not address this issue directly but rather mix forms with and without original /s/ throughout the work. In Cortiade et al. (1991) this problem is addressed in the instrumental case but not elsewhere. Thus, for that suffix there is a special grapheme, viz. ţ, but no prescription for other positions where /s/ alternates with /j/, 0, etc. Hence devleča, but mangesa or mangesa. This was another area of important compromise for the Roms present at the conference. The fact that the forms with /s/ are older while those without /s/ represent dialect-specific innovations gave greater authority to the principle of adopting the compromise.

8. The instrumental case is always written with s, e.g. mansa [“with me”].

Romensar [“with the Roms”].

Although /s/ is after /l/ in the instrumental, the alternation is automatic and so the underlying /s/ is kept in spelling. Moreover, in Arlija and some other dialects the instrumental plural has a variant in /-cf/, Although this is not etymological, the Romani participants included it.

9. The personal pronouns are the following:

me, ti, vov, voj [1 sg., 2 sg., 3 sg., 3 sg., 3 sg. f.]
amen, lumen, von or ola [1 pl., 2 pl., 3 pl.]
There is considerable variation of form in the third person personal pronouns and in the possessive pronouns. The 1992 conference accepted variation in the third plural personal pronoun but not elsewhere.

10. The possessive pronouns are the following:

mo, to, po [1sg., 2 sg., reflexive]
amaro, rumaro [pl., 2 pl.]
leske, lake, lenge [3 sg., m., sg. f., pl.]

See point 10 above. The singular possessive pronouns show the most variation and phonological change. By adopting these forms, those at the conference felt they were choosing those forms which were simplest and most transparent and most easily learned by speakers of other dialects.

11. The definite articles are the following:

nominitive masculine singular: 0
nominitive feminine singular: i

All others: e

o Rom, i Romni, e Roma, e Romnja, e Romeske, e Romnjake, e Romenge, etc.’

These are the rules for Džamhaz rather than Arlija, which has o in the nominative plural. It thus represents a significant dialectal compromise. It also gives equal weight to marked masculine and feminine forms rather than marking the feminine nominative i as opposed to the masculine and plural nominative o as is done in Arlija.

12. The comparative is formed with the prefix po- or the suffix -eder. The superlative is formed with maj-

At this stage it was felt that the most essential points had been covered and that a basis for further work and elaboration had been established. The points 12 through to 15 were added on as examples of the type of elaboration that would need to be covered in the course of standardization.

13. The names of the days of the week are the following: kurko, palkurko, dujtdi, tritodi, štartodi, pančodi, savato [“Sunday, Monday, etc.”]

14. The names of the seasons of the year are the following: anglonilaj, nilaj, palonilaj, iven [“spring, summer, etc.”]

15. The names of the months are the international ones.

4. Conclusion

Haugen (1966: 16-26) defines four stages in the development of language planning and standardization: 1) selection of norm, 2) codification of form, 3) elaboration of function, and 4) acceptance by the community (cf. also Ismalji 1991). As was indicated at the beginning of this article, the Romani documents under discussion here all represent the first stage. They are proposals, initiatives concerning linguistic form, but their implementation is still in process. When compared with early documents in the histories of other languages spoken in Macedonia (cf. Xhuvani 1905/1980, Koneski 1950, Peco et al. 1972), the 1992 document under consideration here can be seen to be of the same basic type. In addition to addressing essential issues such as dialectal base and alphabetical form, features of phonology and morphology that are most basic, problematic and/or salient to speakers themselves are those for which norms are specified. Language contact is generally studied in terms of lexical and structural borrowing, but normativization can also be seen as a contact process, especially in a context such as that of Romani in Macedonia. The elaboration of a Romani standard in Macedonia is taking place not only in the environment of the international Romani movement, but also in contact with other standard languages that have themselves only recently achieved elaboration and acceptance, which are in fact on-going processes. Just as Lunt (1951), by encouraging Macedonian grammarians to use the third singular present as the citation form of the verb, had a significant impact on the standardization of conjugational types, so too, documents such as that produced by the 1992 Skopje conference have the potential to influence the on-going process of Romani normativization in such a way that the lessons of other languages can be applied and modified where appropriate.

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