Romanians in Serbian Banat: Dynamic Epistemology

Biljana Sikimić

Introduction

In defining the approach taken by the group of linguists from the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies as anthropological-linguistic, we should at once point out that this owes much to Slavistics and Balkanology, and the preference for field work inevitably emerges from experience gained in classic Slav dialectology and ethno-linguistic geography. Both these disciplines were until very recently structuralist in approach and essentially static, aimed at reconstructing a "pure" state of local speech, an "ethnographic reality," a sort of monolithic local – necessarily rural – community. By diverting attention towards the interviewee as an individual, anthropological linguistics automatically raises the problem of the possibility of an individual representing the community as a whole; the community itself becomes a problem. By speaking directly to interviewees, field research generally provides an insight into the dynamic dimension of researching a community, but thanks to maximum demand for an appropriate body of documentation, it does not exclude drawing conclusions of a static nature either.

This article deals with the actual dynamics of learning from various experiences gained in field research in Romanian speaking communities in Serbia. On the other hand, as it seeks to provide better insight into the topic of "Romanianness," the geographical borders of the Serbian part of historic Banat will be crossed in several directions: towards the east,

Romanian part of historic Banat, then in Serbia towards the south, across the Danube River to the area inhabited by the Romanian speaking Vlachs of northeast Serbia, and towards the west, across the Tisa River up to Bačka, an area inhabited by the Romanian speaking Bayash.

It was only in the early 21st century that anthropologically inclined researchers: Otilia Hedeşan, Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković and the author of this article, begin to write of "three groups of Romanian language speakers" in Serbia (Romanians of the Banat, Vlachs of northeast Serbia and the Bayash). Following direct encounters in the field, Sorescu-Marinković expands these three "Romanian speaking" groups into women from Romania married in Serbia and – mainly seasonal – migrant workers from Romania, while Sikimić adds bilingual Roma in Romanian Banat settlements to the Romanian language domain. This article adds Aromanians as a new reality in the Banat, a "hidden minority," their Aromanian language/dialect a "heritage language"; and settled Vlachs, mainly part of the labor migration, in Romanian villages of the Banat.[1]

The article concludes by showing how a Romanian identity is "negotiated" in transcripts of a field interview carried out in the Romanian village of Ritiševo/Ritişor in the Banat. Auto-reflexivity and insight into the immediate influence of the researcher on his/her collocutor is one characteristic of the analytical method used by the entire research team from the Institute for Balkan Studies, and is part of conscious movement in the direction of dynamic epistemology.[2] The methodology, besides

---

1 Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "Comunităţi românofone din Serbia. Identitate lingvistică sau ceva mai mult?" in *Români majoritari/Români minoritari: interferenţe şi coabitări lingvistice, literare şi etnologice* (Iaşi: Academia Română, Institutul de Filologie Română "A. Philippide," 2007), pp. 863–876; Biljana Sikimić, "Tragom terenskih istraživanja Emila Petrovića u Srbiji: Čokešina, Lokve i Ždrelo," *Probleme de filologie slavă* XV (Timişoara, 2007), pp. 443–454.

2 In her new monograph on the Balkans, published in Serbian translation, Marija Todorova draws attention to the fact that "cultural and social groups" on various analytical levels (local, regional, national, transitional) are conceptualized in relation to the ongoing processes of "construction" and "agreement." Marija Todorova, *Dizanje prošlosti u vazduh: ogledi o Balkanu i Istočnoj Evropi* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek., 2010), pp. 77–90. The author sees the subject of alterity in the Balkans as controversial: as the structuralism of mid-20th century

insisting on the community as a whole, not just its linguistically representative spokespeople or reliable handers-down of traditional culture, also insists on a chronological average, i.e. a dynamic rendering of the picture by all possible methods, of which one is repeated return visits to the field.[3]

Field Research in the Banat

The empirical material for this work is the result of extensive field work in Serbia and the neighbouring countries, the Romanian part beginning in 1999. Besides the authors' narrowly academic objectives, the research team has made all material publicly available in a digital archive, which at this moment contains close on 400 hours of the Romanian vernaculars spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria. A great deal of material was also recorded in Serbian, due to the fact that all these speakers are at least bilingual, while many are multilingual. All the data (audio, video and photographic) is available through the LAN network of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The archived Romanian language corpus is an oral one, but with the video data and photographs, some rudimentary written texts of these mainly oral vernaculars are provided. The methodology borrowed from

---

has been replaced by constructivism, a deconstruction of epistemological instruments has occurred. Balkan studies still deal with marginal and marginalized ethnic or religious groups and minorities (unlike Western European articles on alterity which recently deal with the majority, invisible up to now, because it formed the standard against which Others were constructed). Globalization, the appearance of cultural hybrids, a new dialogical principle in representing "The Other" impose a new scientific ethic. Todorova sees the future of alterity research in the examination of mobility, fluidity, the flow between what "The Other" is at one moment, becoming "I" in the next and vice-versa. This turnaround will unavoidably spawn other epistemological problems: research will need to diversify, the exclusively ethnic and national construction of alterity to change, and scholars will turn to other aspects such as politics, class, occupation, gender.

3 Sikimić, "Tragom terenskih istraživanja," pp. 443–454.

anthropological linguistics and evolved toward sociolinguistic subfields of linguistic ideology and landscape.[4]

From the end of the 1990s, the entire complex of the Banat was team-researched. The archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies, mentioned above, contains field material from the area in various local dialects of Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Serbian.[5] Many of these local speeches can be considered endangered. Linguistic fieldwork tended to make more use of older members of the various rural communities in Serbia (mainly speakers of Slavic languages and Romanian vernaculars, the researchers' own linguistic competence dictating the choice of language). Most of the interviews were semi-directed, the discussions generally aimed at reconstructing the traditional culture, but with the narratives in the vernacular for both academic and archival purposes. The participants were also encouraged to choose their preferred topic for conversation.

The result of this field research into the Romanian language consists, for the moment, of one volume dealing with the language and identity of the Banyash Roma (*Banjaši na Balkanu*, 2005 and *Bayash in the South Slav context*, 2011, a special issue of the journal *Piramida*); a volume on Romanians in Serbian Banat,[6] a collection of international papers on the academic construct,[7] and a series of articles covering subfields of

---

4 e.g. Biljana Sikimić, "Romanian Linguistic Identity in Today Serbia," in D. Suiogan, Ş. Mariş, C. Dărăbuş, eds., *Cultural Spaces and Archaic Background* (Baia Mare: Editura Univeristăţii de Nord; Editura Ethnologica, 2011), pp. 14–33.

5 Some recent anthropologists discuss the development of regional identity of all inhabitants of the Banat. cf. S. Adam, "Construction of Banat Regional Identity through Life-Story Interviews," in K. Roth, V. Vučinić-Nešković, eds., *Region, Regional Identity and Regionalism in Southeastern Europe* 2 [*Ethnologia Balcanica* 12] (Berlin, 2008), pp. 11–121; M. Dincă, L. Ţîru, "Regional and Ethnical Identity in the Rural Area of Timiş County," *Region, Regional Identity and Regionalism in Southeastern Europe* 2, pp. 23–134.

6 A. Sorescu-Marinković, ed., *Caiete de teren. Torac – metodologia cercetării de teren* (Novi Sad, 2006).

7 B. Sikimić, T. Ašić, eds., *The Romance Balkans* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies of SASA, 2008).

Romanian dialectology and linguistic anthropology,[8] or Vlach linguistic anthropology.[9]

Members of the research team have published a series of studies showing shared features, i.e. Serbian-Romanian and Serbian-Vlach isoglosses in traditional culture. Ethnic and language boundary was perceived as a connecting factor when seen from without, from the researcher's position. From the interviewee angle, the studies almost as a rule perceived subjective differences in places where researchers would not have looked, or in terms of "non-suggested" borders.[10]

---

8 e.g. Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "Imaginea alterităţii la românii din Voivodina. Studiu de caz: Toracu-Mic," *Imaginea străinului*, (Baia Mare: Editura Universităţii de Nord, Editura Ethnologica, 2009), pp. 131–149; Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "Petrovasâla sau cum se construieşte 'acasă'," *Tradiţia* XI (XIII), 26–28 (29–31) (Novi Sad, 2005), pp. 20–21; Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "Românii din Banatul sârbesc: identitate şi memorie," *Probleme de filologie slavă* XIV (Timişoara, 2006), pp. 337–349; Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković "Mogućnosti konstrukcije manjinskog identiteta: jedna biografska priča Rumuna iz Vojvodine," V. Stanovčić, ed., *Položaj nacionalnih manjina u Srbiji* (Beograd: SANU, 2007), pp. 447–460.

9 Svetlana Ćirković, "(Etno)lingvistička istraživanja Vlaha u Srbiji," *Probleme de filologie slavă* XIV (Timişoara, 2006), pp. 273–286; Svetlana Ćirković, "Tradicionalna kultura Vlaha severoistočne Srbije: mogućnosti sekundarne analize terenske građe," in V. Stanovčić, ed., *Položaj nacionalnih manjina u Srbiji* (Beograd, 2007), pp. 447–480; Biljana Sikimić, "Humorni aspekt srpsko-vlaške jezičke komunikacije," *Radovi simpozijuma: jugoslovenski Banat, kulturna i istorijska prošlost* 4 (Novi Sad, 1999), pp. 112–118; Biljana Sikimić, Annemarie Sorescu, "The Concept of Loneliness and Death among Vlachs in Northeastern Serbia," *Symposia. Journal for the Studies in Ethnology and Anthropology* (Craiova: The Center for Studies in Folklife and Traditional Culture of Dolj County, AIUS Publishing House, 2004), pp. 159–183; Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "Torac via Clec: Când biografia bate etnografia," in A. Sorescu-Marinković, ed., *Caiete de teren. Torac – metodologia cercetării de teren* (Novi Sad, 2006), pp. 111–172, etc.

10 Aimed as it was at small ethnic groups in the diaspora, it follows that the same research team has published a series of studies on the subject of The Other, alterity and boundaries. Marija Вучковић, "Други у дискурсу Марка Гурана," *Българските острови на Балканите* (София, 2007), pp. 205–218; Мария

Historical Borders

The historical regions of the Balkans, today divided by state borders, continue to persist to some extent at local level. The legal systems and national policies of the former Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, with the River Danube as a border line, may be traced even in contemporary attitudes towards minority languages, religions and ethnicity all over the

---

Вучкович, "Болгары – это мы или другие? (Само)идентификация павликан из Баната," *Etnolinwistyka* 20 (Lublin, 2008), pp. 333–348; MarijaVučković, "Language and Religion among Bulgarian and Croatian Roman Catholics in the Serbian Banat," in Ch. Voß, ed., *Ottoman and Habsburg Legacies in the Balkans. Language and Religion to the North and to the South of the Danube River*, (München-Berlin: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2010), pp. 247–264; Мария Илич, "Когда 'они' становятся 'мы' а когда 'они'? Устный дискурс сербов из Венгрии," *Etnolingwistyka. Problemy języka i kultury* 20 (Lublin, 2008), pp. 349–366; Marija Ilić, "*Those Were All Serbian Villages by the Danube*: The Concept of Space in Collective Narratives of the Serbs in Hungary," in Christian Voss, ed., *Habsburg vs. Ottoman Legacies in the Balkans. Language and Religion to the North and to the South of the Danube River* (München, Berlin: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2010), pp. 265–289. Exploring alterity has become an important topic in Slavistic ethnolinguistics. An entire issue of the Polish magazine *Etnolingwistyka 20* in 2008 was dedicated to this topic, and the papers are mostly based on folklore material from which safer conclusions can be drawn, conclusions applicable to all, with some exceptions which point to the possibility of analyzing daily speech and oral material from the corpus of minority languages. From their personal field material on Serbs in Hungary (Marija Ilić) and Bulgarian Catholics in the Banat (Marija Vučković), both authors relativize this static perception of alterity.
Through complex stratification and negotiation on the diffuse borders of an ethnic group, the author of this paper also dealt with the example of the Kosovo enclave of Prilužje. From field research of Serbs in Bela Krajina (Slovenia) linguist Tanja Petrović, longterm member of the Institute for Balkan Studies' research team, applied theoretical concepts of linguistic ideology (names such as Michael Silvestrein, Kathrin Woolard, Bambi Schieffelin, Nancy Dorian) to South Slavic studies. Several important contributions covering linguistic ideologies have been published recently in Serbia, thus opening a new and promising field of qualitative approach in Balkan linguistics, see, e.g., Tanja Petrović,

Balkans. At the risk of over-simplifying complex historical processes, there are nonetheless traces of the pragmatic Habsburg policy of preserving the religious and linguistic identities of ethnic groups, and, on the other hand, traces of Ottoman national policy toward ethnic groups, based on the *milet* system. *Milet* identified people solely on the basis of religion; ethnicity played no role. As for Orthodox Christians, the Ottomans made no distinction between Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Macedonian or Romanian Orthodox believers.[11]

Another useful theoretical concept that sheds light on the development of the complex European system of language-religion-national identity may be found in Myhill's concept on pre-modern national churches (e.g. Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Serbs). This idea could usefully be applied to Balkan Studies, despite serious later criticism of some of its aspects. Mayhill's idea of a national language can be interpreted in two distinct ways, either as the spoken language or the sacred/ancestral language of a group, and this distinction has played a crucial role in the development of nationalist movements intended to bring together people who speak the same language but have different religious affiliations.[12] From the point of view of Balkan Studies, it is important that certain Balkan groups established national churches in pre-modern times. These

---

"Studyng the Minority Groups' Identities in the Balkans from the Perspective of Language Ideology," *Balcanica* XXXIV (Beograd, 2004), pp. 173–188; Tanja Petrović, *Srbi u Beloj Krajini. Jezička ideologija u procesu zamene jezika* (Beograd: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2009), for Serbian communities in Slovenia; Ivana Vučina Simović, Jelena Filipović, *Etnički identitet i zamena jezika u sefardskoj zajednici u Beogradu* (Beograd: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 2009), for Sephardic communities in Serbia.

11 This historical heritage is considered crucial for Balkan historical and contemporary sociolinguistics, see, e.g., recent volume on *Ottoman and Habsburg Legacies*, 2010, covering the Balkans and Central Europe, and the volume on the imperial heritage reflected in the culture and literature of the Balkans. D. Bošković, ed., *Imperijalni okviri književnosti i kulture* (Kragujevac: FILUM, 2010); D. P. Hupchick, *Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 133–135.

12 John Myhill, *Language, Religion and National Identity in Europe and the Middle East* (John Benjamins, 2006), pp. 3–4.

groups interpreted their modern national identity as being inherently associated with their religious affiliation and their sacred and ancestral language, even if some of the members did not speak this sacred/ancestral language. Such groups consider themselves different from other groups who based their national identity on spoken language, even if it was the same spoken language.[13] There has been reasoned criticism of some of Myhill's ideas in the meantime, but the sociolinguistic conclusions remain undisputed.[14]

From the point of view of oral history, another more important boundary was set in Banat itself. At the end of World War I, there was a territorial dispute about Banat's division between two newly-formed states – Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians which was resolved by the Peace conference in Paris in 1919. The new border left 65,000 Romanians in the Serbian part of the Banat, a mainly rural population, while most of the intelligentsia opted for Romania.

Researchers in the humanities mostly deal with this border[15]; it is also naturally important for those interested in the subjective perception of their interviewees; from the anthropological point of view, Aleksandra Djurić's study sheds light on its significance as a symbol.[16]

---

13 Myhill, *Language, Religion and National Identity*, pp. 3–4.

14 cf. Erez Levon, "John Myhill: Language, Religion and National Identity in Europe and the Middle East (Discourse Approaches to Society and Culture), John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2006, ix + 300 pp.," *Language Policy* 8 (2009), pp. 169–171.

15 Glogor Popi, *Românii din Banatul sârbesc* (Panciova-Bucureşti: Editura Libertatea, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 1993); Mirjana Maluckov, *Rumuni u Banatu* (Novi Sad: Vojvođanski muzej, 1985); Laura Spariosu, "Rumuni u Banatu," in M. Maticki, V. Jović, eds., *Banat kroz vekove. Slojevi kultura Banata* (Beograd: Vukova zadužbina, 2010), pp. 599–620.

16 Aleksandra Djurić, "The Cross with Four Pillars as the Cebtre of Religious Gathering: Discussing Micro Regional Identity," in K. Roth, V. Vučinić-Nešković, eds., *Region, Regional Identity and Regionalism in Southeastern Europe* 1 [*Ethnologia Balkanica* 11] (Berlin, 2008), pp. 171–184.

Three Romanian Speaking Communities in Serbia: Dialectological Perspective

The dialectological perception of the Romanian language in modern day Serbia is still tainted by ideology. At the time dialectological field research was being published, some of the settlements were part of a much larger country, Yugoslavia, but attitudes towards the Romanian language were ambivalent even at that time.

Dialectologist Radu Flora (1922–1989), whose work on Romanian dialectology is today considered a classic, was extremely knowledgeable on the Serbian Banat and the historical south-Danube Romanian dialects, especially Istro-Romanian. In Romance studies in the second half of the 20th century in the former Yugoslavia, there was a dialectological silence on the subject of Romanian speeches in northeast Serbia, indicative of auto-censorship and a strong taboo on the topic under socialism. Flora's unparalleled knowledge of the situation of Romanian language use in Serbia (predominantly Banat ones) is clear from comments made in passing on his dialectological studies of the Banat.[17] In all humanistic disciplines dealing with Romanians in the Serbian part of the Banat, the widely accepted internal division is onto *Banaćani* (people from Banat), *Erdeljci* (people from Ardeal) and *Oltenci* (people from Oltenia). Today's field research shows that in the dialectological respect, there has been a levelling off in favour of the dominant Banat dialect, and that insistence on these divisions necessarily comes down to a reconstruction of the former state of affairs. However, the undisputed authority of previous generations of linguists has resulted in the old standards still being accepted by contemporary researchers.

An article by Sikimić[18] follows the ideological slanting of dialectological material required for Romanian linguistic atlases produced in another political environment: Romania. These are three sites on the

---

17 Radu Flora, *Dijalektološki profil rumunskih banatskih govora sa vršačkog područja* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1962), and particularly Radu Flora, *Rumunski banatski govori u svetlu lingvističke geografije* (Beograd: Filološki fakultet, 1971).

18 Sikimić, "Tragom terenskih istraživanja," pp. 443–454.

ground in Serbia which the distinguished Romanian linguist and dialectologist Emil Petrovici investigated in the field in 1937, as part of the work for the Romanian Linguistic Atlas II (*Atlas Lingvistic Român*): the Romanian 'Oltenian' site of Lokve/Sân Mihai in the Banat, the Vlach 'Ungurean' (Banat) site of Ždrelo near Petrovac na Mlavi, and the Bayash 'Muntenian' site of Čokešina in Podrinje.

In accordance with the academic views of his time, Emil Petrovici places the Romanian speaking population of Čokešina (for whom the term today would be, for instance, *Karavlachs* or *Bayash*) in quotation marks, but does not do so with the population of the Vlach village of Ždrelo ('Romanians' vs. Romanians). Despite these ethnic qualifications, today considered dubious, his linguistic conclusions and the material he amassed in the field have lost none of their value. Emil Petrovici published his field research of the Mlava valley in September 1937 (collected papers entitled *Notele de folclor de la românii din Valea Mlavei*, published in 1942). From dialectological data gathered in Ždrelo, he concludes that the Vlachs had arrived in the Mlava valley from the area north of the Danube by the early 18th century at the latest. He compares their local speech and folklore material with the speech and folklore of the Almaj River valley, in the south of the Romanian Banat, an area he had previously explored in person.[19]

In a collection of dialectological texts for the Romanian Dialectological Atlas, Emil Petrovici also published seven examples from the Romanian village of Lokve in the Banat. Romanian speeches of the Serbian Banat were studied from the dialectological aspect on several occasions,[20] and here the dialectologically specific Lokve settlement became a *sine qua non* for other dialectologists: in recent times Romanca

---

19 Today Ždrelo is a Vlach *gastarbeiter* village, surrounded by Serbian villages (Bistrica, Šetonje, Ćovdin and Vezičevo), which were included in research by the team from the SANU Institute for Balkan Studies. Examples of the contemporary state of Romanian speech from Ždrelo village were published in: Sikimić, "Tragom terenskih istraživanja," pp. 443–454.

20 Particularly Flora, *Rumunski banatski govori*.

Iovanovici deals especially with Oltenian speeches in Banatsko Novo Selo/Satu Nou, Lokve and Straža/Straja.[21]

However, none of these studies show the particular religion of the Lokve community, and indeed researchers face difficulties in the use of questionnaires alluding to traditional spiritual culture in a multi-confessional field. Ethno-dialectological texts published by Emil Petrovici do not indicate the existence of a large Romanian Nazarene community in Lokve, which certainly existed at the time.[22] The questionnaire for the linguistic atlas was conceived on the basis of the responses anticipated from members of a Christian Orthodox culture, to which neo-Protestant communities, such as the Nazarenes of Lokve, would not have a response. Modern anthropological-linguistic researchers of this type of community or individuals belonging to different confessions require specially adjusted questionnaires).[23]

Three Romanian Speaking Communities of Serbia: Anthropological-linguistic Perspective

For the requirements of anthropological linguistics, a division into three Romanian speaking communities in Serbia seemed the most suit-

21 Romanţa Iovanovici, *Graiurile olteneşti din Banatul de sud. Aspecte fonetice şi morfosintactice* (Panciova: Editura Libertatea, 2006).

22 This fact has also been marginalised in historical and ethnographic syntheses on Romanians in the Banat: ethnologist Mirjana Maluckov only mentions the existence of Nazarenes among Romanians in the Banat, historian Mircea Măran in his review of the history and culture of Romanian settlements in the Serbian Banat does not mention Nazarenes in Lokve, and a glossy historical monograph on Romanians in the Banat by historian Gligor Popi, only mentions them in passing. Mircea Măran, *Localităţi bănăţene* (Panciova: Libertatea, Timişoara: Augusta, 2003); Popi, *Românii din Banatul sârbesc*, p. 210; Maluckov, *Rumuni u Banatu*, p. 15; The individual work with the interviewee is a need, due to the sensitivity of the issue and the stigma which still dogs members of small religious communities in Serbia; besides Lokve village, interviews with Nazarenes also took place in other Banat villages. Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, "Minorităţi duble şi invizibile: românii năzărineni din Voivodina," *Anuar. Institutul de cultură al românilor din Voivodina* (Zrenjanin, 2009), pp. 201–216.

23 Djurić Milovanović, "Minorităţi duble şi invizibile," pp. 201–216.

able, since only it enables the desired complex approach in which the shared factor would be the same language, not religion or ethnic identity. The division is, of course, an academic construct and frequently does not coincide with the perception of the members of these communities.[24] The first group are the Romanians of the Banat region, north of the Danube, belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church, using Romanian as the language of divine service and the revised Julian calendar. The religious union of Orthodox Serbs and Romanians in the Habsburg Empire was dissolved in 1864. Data from the 2011 census gives 29,332 Romanians as living in Serbia (25,410 in the province of Vojvodina). During the time of Austra-Hungary Banat region was one single administrative unit. After the First World War, Banat Romanians were divided by the state border between Yugoslavia and Romania. This paper focuses only on the Romanians from the former Yugoslav and today's Serbian Banat. Rather different was the historical destiny of Vlachs: before the First World War they lived in the Kingdom of Serbia, which became an integral parto of the Kingdom of Yigoslavia. Vlachs in contemporary Serbia live south of the Danube and are Serbian Orthodox, using mainly Church Slavonic as liturgical language and the Old Style calendar. According to the 2011 census, there are 35,330 Vlachs living in Serbia (170 in the province of Vojvodina). The third group are the Bayash, Banyash, or *băieşi* group, ascribed by others as Romanian Gypsies and who live throughout Serbia, except for southern Serbia and Kosovo. They are Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, or Roman Catholic, depending mainly on the religion of the majority population in their place of settlement. For the moment they do not have minority status, and consequently there is no available

---

24 cf. Otilija Hedešan, "Jedan teren: Trešnjevica u dolini Morave," in B. Sikimić, ed., *Banjaši na Balkanu. Identitet etničke zajednice* (Beograd: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2005), pp. 13–106; Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "To Be or Not to Be Romanian: Field Emotions in Romanian Speaking Communities from Serbia," in E. Marushiakova, ed., *Dynamics of National Identity and Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 55–66; Sorescu-Marinković, "Comunităţi românofone din Serbia," pp. 863–876; Sikimić, "Tragom terenskih istraživanja," pp. 443–454.

demographic data. The 2011 census allowed the option for Baysh people to declare their own ethnicity, and the result is 80 Bayash in Serbia as a whole. The estimated figure is over 10,000 people.

On the one hand, it is possible to suggest the existence of three Romanian speaking communities in Serbia (Romanian, Vlach and Bayash), on the other – it is possible to distinguish four different religious systems which couse differences in traditional culture: Serbian Orthodox Church (Vlachs and Bayash), Romanian Orthodox Church (Romanians and Bayash), Roman Catholic Church (Bayash) and Neo-protestant Churches (Romanians and Bayash).

From the linguistic ethnography point of view, there are at least three terminological systems covering traditional culture, due to the fact that different calendars are used (the Julian calendar, the revised Julian calendar and even the Gregorian calendar among Roman Catholic Banyash in the Bačka region). A salient characteristic of both the Romanian and Vlach communities is a well preserved Romanian terminological system of calendar feasts. There are some Romanian Vlach feasts that do not appear on the official Serbian Orthodox calendar, because they fall on a different day (e.g. *Mătcălau*, *Joi verde*, *Ropotin*, *Ziua ursului*, etc.).

Neo-Protestant communities develop ad hoc terminological systems depending on the language of evangelization (Serbian or standard Romanian). We see these different linguistic strategies as a promising field of research both for anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics. Evangelization among Romanians in the villages around the town of Vršac has a long tradition and the same process has recently started in the Banyash settlements to the north of Danube. On the other hand, evangelization among the Romanian language communities south of the River Danube is practically non-existent and even stigmatised. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the ancient border formed by the River Danube exists even today in shaping attitudes toward neo-Protestant churches.

Field work data is usually obtained from the less educated members of the older generations, as this also fulfills the dialectological criteria. The conversations were held in the participant's first language or dialect. Applied qualitative analysis discovered the relationship of "objective," "linguistic" differences that even today reflect dialect stratification and existing "subjective" or "perceptive" differences that lead to local or re-

gional stratification (e.g. Romanians in Banat are seen as coming from *Codru* vs. *Pusta*, that is "the highlands" and "the low lands"). From the linguistic point of view, this stratification can be seen as a "minimal-difference" one, being based only on the lexicon within the same dialect.

Romanians are in a peculiar position in the larger Banat towns (apart from Vršac where there are 1,761 Romanians according to the 2011 census), as these places have no Romanian Orthodox churches, nor offer any possibility of education in the language. There are, however, cultural institutions: the Bureau for Vojvodina Romanian culture in Zrenjanin, founded in 2008 (according to the same census, there are 635 Romanians living in Zrenjanin) and the *Libertatea* publishing house in Pančevo (706 Romanians). A significant number of Romanian intellectuals live in the capital of the province, Novi Sad (772), where there is a chair of Romanian Language at the Philosophy Department of the University and central publishing and media houses in Romanian, but no classes in the language at lower educational levels, nor a Romanian Orthodox church. By comparison, large, ethnically compact Romanian villages in the Banat have over a thousand people (Lokve 1,819, Torak 1,780, Vladimirovac 1,424 according to the 2002 census, due to the fact that the 2011 census data on ethnicity in minor, rural settlements are not yet available).

Negotiating with the Interviewee: Internal Stratification of Romanianness in the Banat

A dynamic picture of negotiating Romanianness appeared from the results of a 2005 study of the village of Mali Torak in Central Banat.[25] This was a very lengthy conversation (approximately 180 minutes) with an elderly interviewee, born in the neighbouring, ethnically mixed village of Klek/Clec.[26] Embracing the theories of Romanian ethnologist

---

25 Sorescu-Marinković, "Mogućnosti konstrukcije manjinskog identiteta," pp. 447–460.

26 The transcript of this interview was published in excerpts, and it was also the subject of an analysis of field work methodology. Sorescu-Marinković, "Torac via Clec," pp. 111–172.

Sanda Golopentia, who explains the concepts "community of memories" and "collective memory" on the example of Germans in the Romanian part of the Banat, Sorescu-Marinković analyses the attachment to Romanianness through critical discourse analysis and views it through a series of concentric circles. Since the fieldwork carried out by the Institute for Balkan Studies is qualitative one, the preferred interviewees are elderly people, and therefore the attitudes of younger generation age group remain unknown.

The first circle of Romanianness is represented by the respectable family from which the interviewee herself comes. After the family circle, less numerous but with strong affective marking, comes the circle of Romanians from the village. However, since the interviewee was born in one Romanian village and married into another neighbouring community in the village of Mali Torak/Toracu Mic, her identification constantly oscillates towards one or other of the two settlements. Sorescu-Marinković assumes that the interviewee belongs in equal measure to the communities of both villages.[27] The third Romanian circle includes settlements in the Serbian Banat which differ from one another depending on the local sub-dialect and dress code. The discourse shows a series of distinctions: between the two Romanian villages (Klek and Jankov Most/Iancaid) on the basis of the spoken language; between another two Romanian villages (Klek and Mali Torak) on the one hand, and a third (Ovča/Ovcea) on the other – because of some details in funeral customs; between Klek and Mali Torak on the one hand and Veliki Torak/Toracu Mare on the other – in national costume and speech. And while the inhabitants of Klek are called *arđil'eni/noi îs dân Arđeal*, and those of Jankov-Most *olteni*, the population of Veliki Torak remains non-specific, they are described as coming from "another place" (*noi îs dân Arđeal, ăşća-s dân altu loc* [we are from Ardeal, those others are from another place]), perhaps due to the fact that the term *bănăţăni* [people from the Banat], quite appropriate for naming the Romainians from Veliki Torak (at least from the linguistic standpoint), is reserved for indigenous Serbs from the Banat (*Ş-ăia toţ or fost lale, cum să spuńe, cum le dzâśe la ăşća, la **bănăţăni*** [They were

---

27 Sorescu-Marinković, "Mogućnosti konstrukcije manjinskog identiteta," pp. 447–460.
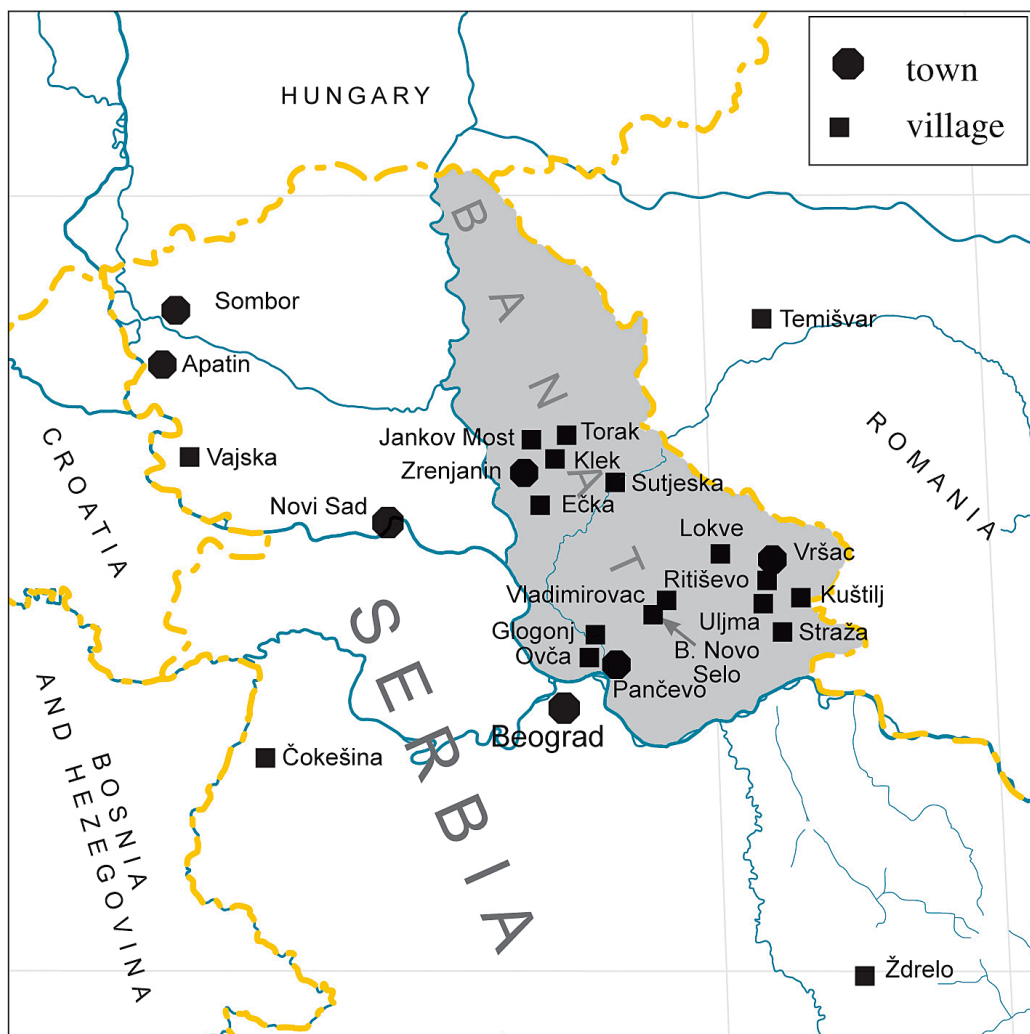
Map: Serbian Banat: settlements mentioned in this article

also all Lalas as they call them, those people from Banat]). Ethnic termn *Lala*, mentioned by the participant, is habitual name of indigenous Serbs in Banat.

Sorescu-Marinković also proposes a sort of interviewee's mental map of Romanian settlements in the Banat.[28] Klek and Mali Torak: the former is her native village where so many of her loved ones are buried at the cemetery, the latter the place where she has been living for more than half a century and in which she feels *at home*. Then, Jankov Most – the closest village to which elderly people from Klek used to go to church and where many girls from Klek were married. There follows Ovča – the village to which Romanians from Klek were at one time relocated and with which family connections exist. Then come Ečka/Ecica and Sutjeska/Sarcea, settlements linked to the oral history of the interviewee's ancestors. The narration also mentions Veliki Torak/Toracu Mare, but by way of comparison with the Romanian villages closer to the interviewee, and the village of Glogonj/Glogoni, mentioned only once because of a distant family connection.

The fourth circle of Romanianness is a trans-border one. It includes both Romanians from the Serbian and from the Romanian Banat. Romanian interviewees from the Serbian Banat often perceive the place in which they live as a space between two territories, between Romania and Serbia, which are, again, not perceived as two separate countries in their discourse.[29] In this way, the capital city of the Romanian Banat, Temišvar/Timişoara often comes up in the interviewee's discourse (unlike Zrenjanin, the closest town in Vojvodina, which is mentioned very sporadically and almost always merely as "the town"). In her analysis, Sorescu-Marinković concludes that "Timişoara is a familiar space, rather too far away to be included in *living space, but representing an*

---

28 Sorescu-Marinković, "Mogućnosti konstrukcije manjinskog identiteta," pp. 447–460.

29 For more details on *border identity* see Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, "The Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia: Fieldwork and Field Methods Today," *Symposia – Journal for Studies in Ethnology and Anthropology* (Craiova, Regional Museum of Oltenia, 2006), pp. 125–142.

area of prestige.[30]   However, while the *special Romania* (Timişoara) is a familiar space with which identification is possible, *Romania in general* represents an alterity." Thus "negotiated" concentric circles do not represent strictly geographical limitations but rather affective and family ones. Equally, borders, overlapping, dissection of space do not exist synchronously but rather diachronically, they are lumped together only in the interviewee's discourse.[31]

Negotiating Borders: The Role of the Researcher

We will show the role of the researcher in the immediate construction of a complex Romanian identity in the Banat in the example of an interview carried out in 2005 in the village of Ritiševo/Ritişor. The recording is kept in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies under Ritišor 1 BS, A. It is a paragraph from an interview by Biljana Sikimić (BS) and Otilia Hedeşan (OH). Transcription: Biljana Sikimić; revision: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković.

The interview took place in 2005, at a time when there were administrative obstacles to communication between the Serbian and Romanian parts of the Banat and difficulty in obtaining visas. The participant is a man of middle age, a Romanian from Ritiševo village in Central Banat (P). The interview is partly in Serbian and partly in Romanian, since the second researcher (OH) is from Romania and does not speak Serbian.

Sociolinguistic positions of the interviewee and two researchers are not equal: P is bilingual (speaks Romanian as his first language, and Serbian as his second), the researcher BS speaks Romanian as a for-

---

30 Sorescu-Marinković, "Mogućnosti konstrukcije manjinskog identiteta," pp. 447–460.

31 Sorescu-Marinković deals with "ethnic Others" from the point of view of Romanians in the Banat, these being Germans, Serbs and Roma. Sorescu-Marinković, "Imaginea alterităţii," pp. 131–149. A fragmentary picture of the perception of Germans from the same angle is also given in Biljana Sikimić, "De la Torac la Clec: informaţia minimală de teren," in A. Sorescu-Marinković, ed., *Caiete de teren. Torac – metodologia cercetării de teren* (Novi Sad, 2006), pp. 173–201.

eign language. Some ad hoc "borders" of the imagined origin of all the participant in the interview were also established: P is insider from the Romanian community in the Serbian Banat, OH is Romanian from the Romanian Banat, and should be taken for granted as an unbiased expert for Romanian culture and identity; the researcher BS is also taken for granted as an unbiased expert for Romanian culture and identity coming from the majority community in Serbia.

P: Ne, ovi [Romi u Ritiševu] nisu Banjaši, oni su Banjaši u Ulmi. To je jedna vrsta Cigana kao kod Apatina i, gore prema Somboru. To je jedna druga vrsta Cigana [*No, these (Roma in Ritiševo) are not Bayash, the Bayash live in Uljma village. This is a kind of Gypsies like those at Apatin and up towards Sombor. This is another kind of Gypsies*].

BS: A vi znate i za te? Cum ştiţi? [*You know about them? How do you know*?]

P: E, kako znam, bio sam. Samo da Vam objasnim malo. Am fost, vă spun românêşce, ca să înţel'eagă şî doamna, elector prântru aleźerea consiliului naţional al românilor dân ăla. Şî ei or vińit dă la Apatin, la Vârşeţ, ţigań, napoi cu trei ańi. La Vârşeţ în sala Steria să śară un învăţător. Lângă Apatin, staţi că vă spun şi satu cum îl cheamă [*Eh, how do I know, I was there. Only let me explain a little. I was, I'll tell you in Romanian, so that the lady can understand too, the elector for the election of the national council of Romanians. And they, the Gypsies, came from Apatin to Vršac, three years ago. To Vršac, to the Sterija hall to look for a teacher. Near Apatin, wait, let me tell you what the village is called*].

BS: Vajska [*Vajska*].

P: Vajska, aşa. Acolo unđ-or cădzut rachece dân Croaţia. Şî l'-o dărâmat casel'e. Or vińit după un învăţător, în urmă cu zece-doişpe ani l'-o murit dascălu, şî nu mai aveau dascăl. Şî nişte ţâgań veńau să ceară dascăl român că nu mai ştiu românêşce şi ei învăţau l'imba română la, Vaiscă, în Vaisca. Avem până la Sombor, ńe ocupăm mult cu aceste lucruri şî cunoaşcem, am fost elector păntru consiliu naţional în două mandace [*Vajska, that's it. Where the rockets from Croatia fell. And destroyed their houses. They came for a teacher, their teacher had died ten-twelve years ago and they no longer have a teacher. And some Gypsies came to ask for a Romanian teacher because they no longer know Romanian, and they had studied Romanian in Vajska, Vajska village. We have all up to Sombor, we dealt a lot with these matters and we know, I was the elector for the national council for two terms in office*].

BS: Nu s-au înclus în Uniunea românilor, da? [*They didn't join the Community of Romanians, right*?]

P: Ei veńau aşa să, nu, nu înţelegeau, ei veńau, ca să, s-or inclus, erau membri. Aveam Uniunea românilor, elimină nişte legitimaţii dă români, care poace să ńe apere în înstituţâl'i dă stat, şi instituţâl'i lege internaţionale, şciţi spatele. Comunitatea românilor din Serbia. Ş-aceste lucruri ne dă facilităţi prăntru primirea vizelor a Românîei [*They used to come like that, they didn't understand, they used to come, they got involved, they were members. We had a Community of Romanians, it issues identity cards to Romanians, which can protect us before government institutions and institutions of international law, you know, protect our backs. The Community of Romanians from Serbia. And these things make it easier for us to get Romanian visas*].

OH: Şi ţigańi s-au inclus? [*And the Gypsies became involved as well*?]

P: Îs incluşi. Ei spun că nu-s ţigańi. Ştiţi, problema lor este o problemă dificilă. Ei nu răcunosc că-s ţigańi, că vorbăsc româneşte, nu vorbesc ţiganeşte [*They are involved. They say they're not Gypsies. You know, their problem is difficult. They won't admit that they're Gypsies because they speak Romanian, they don't speak Gypsy*].

The participant's undisputed Romanianness is emphasized by the fact that, on two occasions, he had been elector for the election of the Romanian national council and so acquired the status of competent insider. The interview with the researchers is on the Bayash from Vajska in the Bačka region, who are close to the Bayash of the neighbouring Banat village of Uljma, therefore a third party, who is absent. This is negotiation over Bayash ethnic identity: Bayash Romanian language identity is undisputed both by the researchers and the participant, a Romanian from the Banat. Researcher OH does not dispute the Roma ("Gypsy") identity of the Bayash from Vajska, part, of course, of a strategy of gaining as much information as possible from the participant. The second researcher (BS) presents herself as an expert on the Bayash question. This interview is part of a process of reluctant negotiation on the Romanian identity of the Bayash which has been going on for the last ten years or so in the Banat (in fact in the province of Vojvodina), but not south of the Danube. Borders are set by both researchers and participant: "They say they are not Gypsies," "They won't admit that they are Gypsies."

Having the fuzzy linguistics theory as a starting point, Sikimić analyzes geographical borders mentioned in the same conversation fragment: the settlement of Vajska in the Bačka region is situated in the

westernmost borderland of the province of Vojvodina.[32] In the eastern-most borderland is the town of Vršac, at the time of conversation (2005) a local urban center for the Romanian community in the Banat, in the immediate vicinity of the village of Ritiševo. By comparison to this imagined center of Banat Romanianness at the time, the Bayash settlement of Vajska is the farthest possible periphery. In the year 2013 this imagined center is, at least formally, the town of Zrenjanin housing the Institute for Romanian culture in Vojvodina.

The "strong" Romanian border, requiring valid visas for Serbian citizens, was "softer" for members of Romanian community. Participant from Ritiševo belives that this circumstance has influenced the Bayash struggle for the formalization of their Romanianness.

Immediately before the quoted fragment, the interview dwelt on the topic of (undisputed) Roma living in Ritiševo. These Roma are known by the researchers to use the local Romanian dialect even in informal communication among themselves, but this fact was not the subject of raising the problem of their (Roma) identity.[33]

Three Romanian-speaking Communities or More?

Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković takes a step further in raising the problem of the boundaries of the three Romanian-speaking communities, starting from this division and pointing out the fact that some other groups in Serbia also speak Romanian, groups whose numbers are difficult to determine.[34] These are Romanian immigrants of more recent times, who have arrived in the Banat and northeastern Serbia in more significant

---

32 Biljana Sikimić, "Rumuni u Vojvodini: subjektivne granice," in S. Gudurić, ed., *Jezici i kulture u vremenu i prostoru* (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet, 2012), pp. 681–691.

33 More details on multilingualism of Ritiševo Roma in Biljana Sikimić, Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković "The Linguistic Richness of Roma in Serbia: Banat and Its Multilingual Dimension," Maja Miskovic, ed., *Roma Education in Europe. Practices, Policies and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 176–177.

34 Sorescu-Marinković, "Comunități românofone din Serbia," pp. 863–876.

numbers following the Romanian revolution of 1989, and Roma in Romanian speaking villages (such as Ritiševo), who, being multilingual, also speak the local Romanian dialect in daily communication.

From the 1990s onward, migrant workers began to leave Romania in significant numbers. Serbia (and before it Yugoslavia) was one of the countries on the list patronised by Romanian migrants not only because of its proximity but also for linguistic reasons. The author points to the marriage migrations (whose representatives she calls "new Romanians") as the "invisible migration": Romanian women arrive in the villages of northeastern Serbia as part of the seasonal work force and frequently settle there permanently. The Vlachs have the term *românoaice* (Romanian woman originally from Romania) unlike the term *românce* which pertains to autochthonous Vlach women from Serbia. In the sociolinguistic sense, the influence of the more recent process of Vlachs going away to school in Romania is also significant, a process which follows a time-honoured custom in educating Romanians from the Banat.[35] The process of arranging marriages with Romanian women from Romania has an even stronger tradition in the Banat.

Another "invisible" Romanian-speaking group in the Banat are economic migrants from northeastern Serbia to whom the Vlach speech of the Romanian language is a first tongue. They are frequently referred to as "Srbijanci" by the autochthonous Romanian population. The Bayash in the Banat, migrants from northeastern Serbia, are also often defined as "Srbijanci." A couple of individual cases were studied by chance in South Banat (for instance, in the Romanian villages of Straža/Straja and Kuštilj/Coştei).

Along with all the active Romanian language interviewees we have mentioned, we should also add another "para-Romanian-speaking" group of Aromanian descendants in Serbia who live dispersed, for the most part in town settlements, and who are presently experiencing a kind of revitalization of their "heritage language." In Pančevo, a Banat town settlement, the Aromanian language is currently in the process of being revived by a non-government organization (*In Medias Res*). The language is taught by qualified professors of Aromanian using textbooks

---

35 Sorescu-Marinković, "Comunităţi românofone din Serbia," pp. 869–871.

from Romania.[36] There is an Association of Aromanians (*Lunjina*) in Belgrade, and among its members are active speakers of the Aromanian language.[37]

Final Remarks

Several factors have helped bring about an awareness of the need to form a dynamic interactive epistemology as part of the broadest possible anthropological-linguistic field work among different minorities, and with local majority groups too. Work with the ethnically complex rural communities of the Banat, particularly its Romanian speaking communities, led to a revision of predetermined academic positions. Through analysis of interviews in the field, information was acquired as a result of negotiation, subjective and fragmentary, but resulting in an indubitably dynamic picture. As a method, joint field research has added to the complexity and dynamism of the picture (as a temporary fixing of the situation) with the participation in the team of researchers of varying gender, age, language knowledge, scientific background and ethnic origin. Notwithstanding the fact that the interviewees often perceive the team as a whole, a dynamic epistemology is possible because of the synchronous adjustment of the community to the various researchers. The next important factor is contemporary local context that can differ even from house to house in one rural settlement. The possibility of comparable research in urban communities becomes a matter of chance. The fragmented nature of minority communities in modern urban settings enables work only with individuals known to the researcher, or with people who are politically or culturally engaged. This ultimately leads to auto-censorship of the interview, and auto-correction of its linguistic expression: only a step away from erasing all subjective boundaries.

---

36 Aromanian classes have been taught for 3 years as part of an Open Language Workshop, two hours per week, two semesters per year.

37 For the sociolinguistic image of the Aromanian language in Serbia, see Zoran Plasković, "Status i etnički identitet Cincara između očekivanja i stvarnosti," in B. Sikimić, ed., *Skrivene manjine na Balkanu* (Beograd: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2004), pp. 147–156.