LINGUISTIC FORM AND CONTENT IN THE ROMANI-LANGUAGE PRESS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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0. Introduction

The Republic of Macedonia has one of the most significant Romani populations in Europe. According to the 1994 census 43,732 people or 2.3% of the total population declared themselves to be of Romani nationality (Nova Makedonija 15.IX.94:1). The figures were 52,103 and 2.7% in the 1991 census.[1] Romani nationality thus constitutes the fourth largest in the Republic after Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish. The figures for the relationship of declared nationality to first or other language are not yet available, but given discrepancies in the categorization of nationality and language (e.g. Muslim constitutes a nationality category but not a linguistic one), it is not unreasonable to assume that -- despite the fact that some individuals declaring Romani nationality will have a non-Romani first language -- the total number of Romani speakers is higher than available figures indicate.[2]

The fact remains that Romani is both statistically and legally a significant language in Macedonia. It was one of the six languages used in the 1994 census and is the language of television and radio broadcasts coming out of Skopje, Tetovo, and Kumanovo. Like other languages of Europe that have emerged as vehicles of public life during the past two centuries, Romani in the Republic of Macedonia (as in other countries) has been the subject of efforts at literary standardization. Unlike the case with some other languages, however, the standardization of Romani is taking place in both a national and a transnational context. On the one hand, there have been efforts such as Jusuf and Kepeski's *Romani gramatika* (1980, henceforth, RG), which, while having in mind that transnational context, was nonetheless directed primarily at the Romani audience in Macedonia, as evidenced not only by the choice of dialects but also by the fact

that it was published bilingually in Romani and Macedonian. Similarly, the standardization conference of November 1992 sponsored by the Board of Education of the Republic of Macedonia and the University of Skopje, while explicitly aware of the efforts at creating an international Romani literary language as specifically mentioned in the resulting document, nevertheless had as its goal a standardization of Romani as a language of study in schools in the Republic of Macedonia (see Friedman 1995).

On 17 November 1993 the first issue of a Romani monthly newspaper, *Romani Sumnal/Romski Svet* 'Romani World' (hereafter RS), was published in Skopje under the editorial leadership of Oskar Mamut, who is also employed in the Romani-language division of Radio-Television Skopje.[3] The newspaper is bilingual, with all material in both Romani and Macedonian. The issue of the codification of a Romani standard language is explicitly addressed on the first page of the first number, where the editorial board states that one of the tasks they have set themselves is contributing to the development and use of literary Romani. As such, the paper can be taken as a measure of the progress and ongoing concerns of the standardization of Romani in the Republic of Macedonia. The role of the mass media is potentially of great importance in language standardization. Taking as its background RG (cf. Friedman 1985), the Skopje Standardization conference of 1992 (cf. Friedman 1995), and international efforts such as the standardization conferences of 1971 and 1990 (cf. Kenrick 1981, Cortiade et al. 1991), this paper will examine issues of RS's orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon as they relate to on-going problems and discussions in the standardization of Literary Romani in the context of the Romani dialectal situation in the Republic of Macedonia with passing reference to other countries, e.g. Romania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and member states of the EU.[4]

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