

Writing Romani: The Pragmatics of Codification in a Stateless Language

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Romani is a stateless, non-territorial minority language with no written tradition. The present paper offers a survey of recent codification efforts. Codification is regional and decentralized, with only marginal international orientation or institutional commitment. Texts tend to show moderate or elaborate adjustment of the majority language alphabet, with occasional 'soft' neologisms. In a pragmatic corpus analysis, three action-oriented functions of Romani codification are identified: a communicative function, an emblematic function, and a mobilizing-rallying function. Overlaps among those functions, and emerging, potentially autonomous functions, are identified for two domains: political journalism and educational material.

1. INTRODUCTION

Romani, the Neo-Indic language of the people known as 'Gypsies', Roma, or Roms, is one of Europe's significant minority languages. Estimates of speaker numbers vary considerably, but it is clear that the Romani-speaking community in Europe, in central and south-eastern Europe in particular, numbers several millions.¹ Table 1 shows the figures for some of the countries cited in this study given in a forthcoming educational publication sponsored by the European Commission and authored by a team of Romani sociologists (Bakker *et al.*, forthcoming).

It is important to note however that these figures are not based on actual census data, but merely on very rough estimates by Romani activists and intellectuals. Even where census data are available on Romani ethnicity or language, as is the case, for example, in Macedonia, Hungary, and Romania, Romani representatives and human rights and cultural associations monitoring the Romani situation strongly believe that they render only a partial picture, since many members of the Romani minority prefer not to disclose their ethnic and linguistic background to officials.

A further issue on which statistics are lacking is the level of education attained by Roma and Romani speakers, and the percentage of Roma who are literate. On the whole, both are believed to be extremely low on average, though there are considerable differences between regions. The only generalization that can be made with confidence is that all adult speakers of Romani are bi- or multilingual, obtaining oral knowledge of the majority

Table 1: Romani populations in Europe and percentage of speakers (adapted from Bakker et al., forthcoming)

Country	No. of Gypsies	Percentage Romani speakers
Albania	95,000	95
Austria	22,500	80
Bosnia-Herceg.	45,000	90
Bulgaria	750,000	80
Croatia	35,000	80
Czech Republic	275,000	80
France	310,000	70
Germany	120,000	70
Greece	180,000	90
Hungary	575,000	50
Italy	100,000	80
Macedonia	240,000	90
Poland	55,000	90
Romania	2,100,000	90
Russia	230,000	80
Serbia-Montenegr.	425,000	90
Slovakia	500,000	80
Spain	725,000	0.01
Turkey	400,000	70

language through interaction outside their group before adolescence. Furthermore, it is safe to assume that all Roma who have access to education are educated in the state language, and so their command of literacy in the state language always precedes any attempts, be they institutionalized or private, to acquire literacy in Romani. Indeed, with few exceptions,² all the Romani-language material surveyed in the present study targets Roma with a command of literacy in their respective national or state language.

Romani is typically and historically an oral language, and Gypsy culture rests entirely on oral traditions. Nevertheless, attempts to write Romani for purposes other than academic documentation go back at least to the first translation of parts of the Gospel into Romani in 1836. Based on one of the dialects of the Sinti group in Germany, the manuscript was completed in Friedrichslohra but was not published until 1911, when it appeared, edited by

R. Finck, under the title *Paramisa—Amare Raieskr Jezu Christi Duk te meripen*, with Theodor Urban publishers in Striegau. Significantly, the cover page carries the following message in German: ‘Friends of the missionary movement are courteously asked to distribute this booklet among the Gypsies, and to read it aloud to them’.

Modern attempts to publish in Romani date back to state-backed periodicals and literary translations in the Soviet Union during the early 1930s, with scattered follow-up attempts in various Soviet-bloc countries in the post-war era, in addition to missionary translations, isolated literary editions, and some, though few, political newsletters and private correspondence among Romani political activists and intellectuals during the 1970s–80s. None of this is comparable in its intensity to the upsurge of Romani-language publications following the political transition in central and eastern Europe in 1989–90, with which a new era in the codification of Romani began.

Descriptive analyses of Romani codification efforts are usually devoted to particular countries, single dialects, or specific unification concepts. In terms of methodology, their focus tends to centre around one or several of Haugen’s (1972 and elsewhere) famous standardization stages (selection, codification, elaboration, and propagation of a written norm). The present article is an attempt at a more global evaluation of the codification process which takes into account its pluralistic and contradictory dimensions. In particular, it adds to the structural examination—i.e. of varieties, orthographies, extended lexicon, and propagation vehicles—a functional or *pragmatic* dimension. This dimension is concerned with the action-related *motivation* behind codification.

Romani dialects are diverse and geographically dispersed; their speakers usually form communities that are socially isolated. Cultural institutions are largely community-based and operate at a local level; political awareness and active involvement in societal affairs are recent phenomena still confined to a minority of intellectuals and politically active individuals. The prevailing attitude in some Romani communities in fact favours a traditionalism which cherishes oral transmission of language and customs, and which views written codification as an attempt by outsiders, be it *gadže*³ or assimilated or acculturated Roms, to interfere with internal community affairs.⁴ Conversely, educated Roms have occasionally expressed scepticism towards the employment of Romani as a medium for school education, propagating mainstream language education instead.⁵ In such a context, Romani literacy is all but self-evident, for it entails a change in prevailing attitudes towards language, community relations, and ethnic identity (cf. Matras and Reershemius 1991).

The question of motivation is all the more relevant when taking into account that a significant number of those involved in Romani language standardization efforts are not themselves native speakers of the language, and that the logistic and financial resources allocated to the process are not provided through the community of native speakers, but by institutions external to it. Thus the adequacy and the success of some standardization

concepts are ultimately negotiated and evaluated outside the speech community.

An analysis of the standardization process must therefore take into consideration, alongside the overt goal of transposing oral speech into written form, also the *covert* functions of standardization. I regard such an approach to standardization as functional and pragmatic, since it is concerned not only with the form and content of the structures under scrutiny, but also with the actional intentions behind them. In the following I identify three such action-oriented functions of Romani codification attempts: a *communicative* function, an *emblematic* function, and a *mobilizing-rallying* function. In addition, overlap among those, as well as emerging, potentially autonomous functions, is identified for two domains: political journalism and educational material.

The present article is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the involvement of descriptive linguists in the standardization process, and the conclusions drawn in previous accounts of local, regional, and international codification efforts. It will be shown that on the whole, attention has been restricted to structural aspects of codification, such as the choice of variety and orthography. In Section 3 I provide my own survey of structural features of codification in Romani, examining academic publications, the production of texts, and language design. Within text productions, which account for the bulk of codified material, I identify various strategies of accommodation to national (i.e. state-language) and international spelling conventions. In Section 4 I proceed to a pragmatic analysis of texts that goes beyond structural aspects, focusing on the action-related functions of codification.

The corpus on which I draw in Sections 3 and 4 comprises three main categories of written communication: (a) Romani texts published in an academic context, (b) non-academic Romani-language publications, and (c) personal letters, circulars, e-mail messages, conference handouts, and leaflets in Romani. The corpus has been collected since the beginning of my academic involvement with the Romani language in 1988, which coincided with the beginning of my involvement in Romani educational and civil rights activities. Thanks to the intense networking of Romani linguistics during the past several years, and owing of course to the relatively limited amount of publications in and on Romani, I can claim to have had access to a representative portion of texts published since the 1960s that fit categories (a) and (b). They include grammars, dictionaries, and text collections, on the academic side, and fables, popular and political journal articles, Gospel translations, educational material, and collections of poems and short stories, for the non-academic category.

Items belonging to category (c) were collected or viewed as part of what might be termed participant observation in an international context of Romani civil rights, education, and information networking between 1990–97, covering meetings and correspondences relating to issues of Romani schooling, media, political representation, and refugee and immigrant relief work. It is here—during this period and in this context of activities—that

Romani literacy outside academic institutions is gaining ground, serving political and practical purposes.

A quantification of the corpus is hardly possible, as texts vary in length and consistency of orthographic representation, and authors vary considerably as regards their background and the extent of their involvement in Romani writing. It was therefore deemed more appropriate to arrive at a useful categorization drawing on general impressions and a local, case-based interpretation of motivations and writing strategies, and to propose a framework for analysis of current developments on this basis.

2. THE STANDARDIZATION DISCUSSION: DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNTS

2.1 Regional and national case studies

Parallels between the standardization of Romani and the issues at stake in the standardization process of national languages in general are drawn by Friedman (1985) in his study of what might be regarded as the first prescriptive grammar of the language, published in Macedonia by Kepeski and Jusuf (1980). The grammar is intended for use by Romani speakers in Macedonia; it is based largely on the local Arli dialect, but includes forms from other varieties spoken in Macedonia, and adopts the Roman script as used in former Yugoslavia. It was not until Macedonian independence however that Romani obtained official status. In 1992, a Romani Standardization Conference was organized by the Ministry of Education and the Philological Faculty at the University of Skopje and attended by a number of Romani intellectuals as well as government representatives and linguists. The conference produced a document with guidelines for orthographic and some grammatical rules, narrowing some of the variation in Kepeski and Jusuf's (1980) grammar (see Friedman 1995). Romani was then included as one of the official languages in the questionnaire documents produced in connection with the 1994 population census (Friedman 1996). Usage of Romani in a recent periodical shows a continuation of the basic principles set by both Kepeski and Jusuf's (1980) grammar and the 1992 Standardization Conference (Friedman 1997).

Contrasting with the centralized initiative in Macedonia, Hübschmannová (1995) describes Romani codification in the Czech and Slovak Republics as 'trial and error'. Despite no official involvement in codification efforts, the period since 1990 has seen the appearance in print of several dozen editions of stories, fables, and poems as well as numerous Romani-language articles in bilingual periodicals produced by Romani cultural and political associations. The availability of a comprehensive Romani–Czech dictionary (Hübschmannová *et al.* 1991) as well as encouragement from the Department of Romani Studies at the Charles University in Prague have undoubtedly helped secure a position for the Romani orthography, already drafted by the Union of Roma in

the early 1970s and based largely on the Czech alphabet. Hübschmannová (1995) as well as Hübschmannová and Neustupný (1996) however note considerable variation in both spelling and choice of grammatical forms and lexical items.

On the basis of an empirical investigation of comprehension of, and attitudes towards, published texts in Czech and Slovak varieties of Romani, Hübschmannová and Neustupný (1996) nevertheless conclude that this variation neither impedes communication nor does it create or reinforce social divisions. Moreover, they argue in support of a so-called 'post-modern' attitude towards standardization in which uniformity should make way to accepted variation or 'polycentricity', elaboration should be selective and fit the immediate needs, and codification should not be regarded as entirely binding for participants.

Halwachs (1996, 1998) describes co-operation between a team of linguists based at the University of Graz and representatives of the community of only some two thousand speakers of the dialect called Roman in the Austrian Burgenland district. This community-based project has profited from the opportunities granted through official recognition in 1993 of the Roma as an ethnic minority in Austria, and the willingness of government agencies to allocate resources for linguistic documentation and publications in the dialect, including educational material.

Halwachs (1996) describes how speakers were given a selection of words that had been chosen to reflect the phonology of the dialect, and were then asked to write them down. On the basis of the responses, possible orthographic variants were identified. Significantly, suggestions by linguists to introduce diacritics based on the south-western Slavic alphabets (ž, š, č) were rejected by community members on practical grounds of unfamiliarity, and perhaps also because of their perception as low-status symbols associated with neighbouring Slovenia. The outcome is an orthography based on German, but regularized in such a way as to minimize inconsistencies. Thus for example, /š/ is spelled *sch* throughout, including in initial positions preceding *t* or *p* (where German has simply *s*, for example, *schpita* 'hospital' <*Spital*), and dialectal German loanwords are adapted to the spelling conventions (for example, *dahea* 'hither', German *daher*).

Comparing these three examples of Romani codification efforts—Macedonia, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and the Austrian Burgenland—we find different extents of official involvement and official support through allocation of resources, varying degrees of community involvement, differing levels of linguists' control over the process versus open and spontaneous participation of authors and associations, and finally a range of compromises in the choices for orthographic representation. Four 'basics' however are shared: (1) selection is based on the immediate variety of Romani spoken in the respective region/country, (2) codification is based on the alphabet of the standard majority language, or in the case of Macedonia on that of an alphabet previously in use in the country as one of two official scripts, (3) no

centrally planned elaboration can be found, with the exception of Kepeski and Jusuf's (1980) grammar, and lexical innovation is left to the creativity of single authors, (4) propagation opportunities coincide with increasing cultural and political participation of the Roms in public life, owing to changes in the political climate in the respective countries.

2.2 Unification and language engineering

Clashing with this general pattern of regionally diversified developments is the discussion surrounding the prospects of international unification of a literary form of Romani. The matter has been subject to debate among scholars since a proposal by Gilliat-Smith (1960) to foster a 'Common Romani', and a critical reply by Wolf (1960) who claimed a lack of need and motivation among the Roms to codify their language. Similar scepticism is expressed by Iglă (1991), who points out three main obstacles to unification: lack of motivation and need on the part of native speakers with the exception of a handful of intellectuals, lack of a central authority capable of drafting and implementing a norm, and the prestige which speakers generally attribute to their own native dialects and which would hinder any chances of multi-dialectal levelling or acceptance of imposed norms.

Authors with a more enthusiastic approach all belong to a circle of a few dozen individuals who have been regular participants in the framework of the International Romani Union formed in 1971, among them linguists and other intellectuals of both Romani and non-Romani origin. The standardization of the Romani language has been on the agenda of the Union's meetings ever since its very beginning (see discussion in Courthiade 1990; Kenrick 1996), and it is seen by members as part of the symbols of nationhood.

As regards practical detail, however, linguist participants in the Union's activities take very different stands. Courthiade (1990, 1992) sees in the adoption of his proposal for a 'polylectal' alphabet (see below) by an academic congress in Sarajevo in 1986, and by the International Romani Union's Fourth World Romani Congress in 1990, sufficient authorization to be able to speak of an already existing 'standard alphabet' and 'unified language' (see also Courthiade 1989a, 1989b). Kenrick (1996: 116–20) presents a much more contradictory picture of the history of discussions and decision-making processes at the World Romani Congresses, acknowledging the existence of several standards and the lack of universal recognition for the proposal adopted in 1990.

Some Union-member linguists have based their proposals for a standard on particular dialects: Kochanowski (1989, 1994, 1995) proposes to adopt his native Baltic Romani dialect as a basis for a standard on the grounds that it has preserved more of the original Romani morpho-phonology, while Hancock (1993) sees in mutual linguistic adaptations in oral usage among speakers of Vlax (Romanian-Transylvanian Romani) varieties in North America an empirical justification for basing an international standard on Russian

Kelderash Vlax. A critic of unification proposals from among the Union's followers is Acton (1995), who warns against the danger of excluding dialects of Romani from the 'official' literary variety.

3. CODIFICATION PATTERNS AS 'GLOBAL STRATEGIES'

As far as methods of codification employed for Romani are concerned, three 'global strategies' can be identified: codification for the purposes of academic documentation of speech (Academic Codification), codification for the purposes of transposing oral usage into texts directed at audiences (Text Production), and codification in the service of unification and language engineering projects (Language Design).

3.1 Academic Codification

Various conventions of phonetic and phonological transcription have been applied to Romani since the early nineteenth century. Though never conventionalized among Romani linguists, a consensus seems to prevail on the use of wedge-accented as employed in south-western Slavic alphabets to indicate palato-alveolars (*š, ž, č*), and the use of *-h* to indicate distinctive aspiration on voiceless stops/affricates (*ph, th, kh, čh*). These conventions appear not only in data presentation, but also in works with potential normative functions, such as the major recent comprehensive dictionaries by Boretzky and Iгла (1994), Hübschmannová *et al.* (1991), the Romani-English version of Demeter and Demeter (1990), or the reference grammars by Kepeski and Jusuf (1980) and Hancock (1995).

Items for which notations differ include palatalization, with notations varying between insertion of apostrophes (*t', l'*), insertion of a palatal phoneme sign (*tj, lj* or *ty, ly*), or, where appropriate, special palatal graphemes from Slavic languages (*ć, ź*, etc.). The velar fricative */x/*, though usually represented as *x*, is occasionally adapted to the writing systems of central and south-eastern Europe and rendered as *h* or *ch*. The opposition between trilled and uvular *r*, found in some Romani dialects, is represented as either *r:ř* or *r:rr*. Finally, for schwa, a rather peripheral phoneme in most dialects of Romani, different solutions prevail as well, though the IPA symbol *ə* is common. Other centralized vowels are occasionally rendered as *î, î* or *y*.

3.2 Text Production

The production of Romani texts for audiences is in most contexts based on the individual author's oral usage of the language. Thus Text Production is typically not an attempt at unification. We are dealing here primarily with Romani-language articles in bilingual periodicals, with Gospel translations, some editions of original prose and poetry in Romani, a few literary translations, and a number of editions of educational materials. They fall into two types: texts relying entirely on alphabets of the official state

(majority) language, and those seeking partial compromise through solutions adopted either from scientific transcriptions or from other international norms.

3.2.1 The ‘moderate adjustment’ strategy

Graphemes and grapheme combinations that do not appear in the majority language are largely avoided in this type of texts. Often, aspiration, indicated by *h* following stops, is the only addition to the standard state-language alphabet. Occasionally one finds a doubling of *r* representing the uvular fricative. The German-based spelling used in the Burgenland and outlined above can also be considered a case of ‘moderate adjustment’.

3.2.2 The ‘elaborate adjustment’ strategy

Elaborate adjustment similarly minimizes that addition to the alphabet, but allows some modifications in the value of graphemes compared to state-language orthographies. Probably the most widespread example is the alphabet used for the Lovari dialect in Romani-language publications in Hungary. It follows Hungarian orthography in using combinations of consonants and *y* to indicate palatalization, but introduces *sh*, *zh*, and *ch* for palato-alveolars (rather than rely on Hungarian *s*, *zs*, and *cs*) as well as *ph*, *th*, *kh* for aspirates. This system is used in editions of Romani poetry, in a Romani reader (Karsai and Rostás-Farkas 1991), in literary and Gospel translations, and in occasional Romani contributions to magazines published by Romani associations.

An example of the introduction of new graphemes is the system used, though inconsistently, in the Romani-Polish bilingual publication *Rrom p-o drom*, published in Białystok. Here, the graphemes *y* and *ł* from Polish indicate special features of the local Romani dialect, but for palato-alveolars Polish graphemes alternate with *š*, *č*, *ž*, which are evidently borrowed from what is perceived as a more international spelling. Another, though more isolated, case is the use of the grapheme *š*, alongside Romanian-based orthography, in Romani poems published by Luminița Mihai in the magazine *Divano romano* in Sibiu (1990). Both can be seen as cases where the academic tradition, and especially normative and potentially normative academic works, constitute a target for imitation and infiltrate popular usage, owing perhaps also to their compatibility with the writing systems of Czechia, Slovakia, and the former Yugoslavia.

3.2.3 The ‘no-compromise’ strategy

Finally, there is the ‘no-compromise’ type of codification for text production, where no attempt to derive Romani spelling from that of the majority language is made, but instead an independent Romani orthography is designed. This is usually based on some variant of the academic conventions,

as outlined above, and which share š, č, ž as well as indication of aspiration, in a Roman-based script. Such a system is used in Gospel translations in the Kelderash dialect that appeared in the United States and France, including the well-known translation by Matéo Maximoff, and in educational material in the Kelderash dialect published by the Swedish Board of Education. It is perhaps no coincidence that these examples all involve the Kelderash dialect in western countries, where it is typically spoken by immigrant communities.

A further example of what I call the 'no-compromise strategy' is the use of an academic-style spelling in the translation by Puxon, into a Balkan Romani dialect, of a monograph by Puxon and Kenrick (1988), published in London, which deals with the Romani Holocaust. A series of 12 children's booklets appeared in Hamburg in 1996 in a tridialectal Romani translation (Lovari, Gurbet, and the Polska Roma dialect) using the same academic-type spelling for all three versions (see Matras 1997a, 1997b). A 'no-compromise' system resembling the Romani spelling used for Lovari in Hungary has been adopted in Bulgaria for an Arli-based variety in a series of bilingual Romani-Bulgarian educational material published by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, as well as in a multidialectal Romani-Bulgarian glossary (Kyuchukov 1993).

3.3 Language Design

Unlike Text Production, Language Design is not about reaching an audience of readers, but about propagating ideal solutions for the production of texts in domains which typically are not covered by contemporary oral usage. Kepeski and Jusuf (1980), for example, introduce many neologisms that involve grammatical terminology. In seeking to re-Indianize the language, the authors turn to Hindi terms, which in turn are often derived from Persian and ultimately of Arabic origin, and use common Romani derivational affixes to integrate them: *zamani* 'tense', *šartijalo* 'conditional'.

Only two concepts for language design have in fact been implemented in recent years. The first is authored by Juan de Dios Ramirez-Heredia, former Spanish member of the European Parliament, journalist, and Gitano activist. Ramirez-Heredia's goal is to revive the Romani language in Spain, where it is believed to have already become extinct during the seventeenth century, and where merely isolated items of Romani origin remain embedded in the Spanish slang spoken by the Gitanos and known as Caló. Ramirez-Heredia (1993) calls his designed language Romanó-Kaló. It is based on a selection of vocabulary and grammatical features from a variety of Romani dialects, avoiding constructions that are strongly deviant from Spanish. Romani synthetic case endings are abolished and instead prepositions are adopted, where necessary on the basis of peripheral solutions such as the use of *katar* 'from' to paraphrase the genitive (Spanish *de*), or of the German preposition *mit* borrowed into the Sinti dialect (German Romani), to paraphrase the instrumental which otherwise has no analytic expression in Romani. Declensional patterns are adjusted as well, with Romani indeclinables such

as *dujto* 'second' or *jekho* 'one, a' acquiring, by analogy to Spanish, gender inflection based on Romani adjectival endings (m. *dujto* f. *dujti*, Spanish *segundo/segunda*; m. *jekho* f. *jekhi*, Spanish *un/una*). No diacritics are used, and the orthography resembles that in wide use in Hungary, with *sh*, *ch*, *zh* for palato-alveolars, *ph*, *th*, *kh* for aspirates, and *ty*, *dy* for palatals. This artificial variety has been used in print in the Spanish Romani Union's publication *Nevipens Romani* supported by the European Commission, as well as, alongside Spanish, in the organization's official correspondence and on its internet website. The texts abound in neologisms, usually calques on Spanish vocabulary formed through compositions of Romani roots and derivational morphology.

The second language design project has occasionally been referred to as 'the Romani common alphabet' (Courthiade 1992), or 'the international standard' (Hancock 1995: 44; for a discussion see also Kenrick 1996). Its most distinctive features are the meta-notations (\mathfrak{z} , \mathfrak{a} , \mathfrak{o} etc.) intended to cover cross-dialectal phonological variation, in particular different degrees and effects of palatalization, and a set of 'morpho-graphs' (θ , q , ζ) used to capture the morphophonological alternation of case suffixes in different phonological environments (for example, *man-ge* 'for me', *tu-ke* 'for you', are written *manqe*, *tuqe*). A further curious feature is the use of an exclamation mark within the word to highlight the vocative ending: *chaj!e* 'girl!'.

The declaration by linguist delegates to the World Romani Congress of April 1990 has helped the alphabet's author, M. Courthiade, gain support for the further development and propagation of his standardization concept from the Commission of the European Union, which has allocated considerable funds for a 'Research and Action Group on Romani Linguistics' launched in 1992. Various publications by the group in the EU-backed 'Interface' series apply Courthiade's standardization concept. The alphabet has also been adopted for the Romanian Kelderash dialect in two publications by Sarău (1992a, 1992b).

3.4 Codifying variation

Courthiade (1992: 9) has referred to his alphabet as 'polylectal', as it foresees and institutionalizes cross-dialectal variation in pronunciation. Critics of the concept⁶ have pointed out the inconsistency of using abstract symbols to reflect variation in the pronunciation of grammatical morphemes, while at the same time ignoring phonological alternation in lexical roots. Thus *tuqe* 'for you' may be read as /túke/, /túće/, etc. depending on the phonology of the particular dialect in question, but no abstract grapheme captures the corresponding alternation between /kher/ and /cher/, 'house'. Applying Courthiade's alphabet thus demands extreme proficiency of morphological analysis. The question arises whether it is necessary to integrate variation into a unified system, or whether variation could just as well be allowed for by using compatible writing systems to codify different morphophonological variants.

Existing variation in the form and orthographic representations of codified dialects of Romani has been compared to the compatibility among written standards of the Scandinavian languages (Kenrick 1996: 116; Matras 1996: 221). A recent study of native speakers' translations of a primer into three different Romani dialects (Matras 1997a) has shown that variation is largely of the type which speakers-turning-readers might be expected to be able to tackle with relative ease. Thus there are morphophonological variants such as *muro cikno phral* (Lovari dialect), *mrno cikno phral* (Gurbet dialect), *miro tykno pšał* (Polska Roma dialect) 'my little brother', and morphosyntactic variants such as the use of analytic versus synthetic case in *o vast katar o Ali* (Lovari), *Alískro vast* (Polska Roma) 'Ali's hand', or *anda jekh cikno vast* (Lovari), *jekhe tykne vastestyr* (Polska Roma) 'out of a small hand'. Even in the lexical domain, where barriers are more significant due to borrowings, the translators, who had been instructed to try and adapt their versions to one another's without introducing new terms or borrowings from other dialects, came up with versions that were to a large extent compatible. Table 2 (cf. Matras 1997a: 184) summarizes these observations.⁷ The unit of analysis is lexical tokens, for it is the occurrence of each and every token which might impede comprehension. In measuring token compatibility, morphophonological variation of the type exemplified above was allowed for, and only content words but no grammatical morphemes (pronouns, conjunctions, etc.) were included.

The findings provide a very rough indication of the potential for written comprehensibility among dialects at a very basic level aimed at schoolchildren who are just beginning to read. Thus, of the 75 (15.8 per cent) differing tokens, roughly two-thirds were items belonging to the Romani core vocabulary which could in principle be accessible to speakers of other dialects, albeit in slightly different meanings (for example, *naj* can mean either 'finger' or 'fingernail', *kirmo/čirmo* can mean 'worm' or 'reptile'). The remaining 31 tokens, roughly one-third of all differing tokens, represent items from the current, diverse contact languages. Admittedly, all three dialects share Slavic contact languages, though with different degrees of impact on their lexicon; but this is also the case for the bulk of Romani dialects in south-

Table 2: Lexical compatibility among three Romani text versions: Lovari, Gurbet, and Polska Roma dialects.

Total lexical tokens	475	(100%)
Tokens identical in all three versions	245	(51.6%)
Tokens identical in any two of the versions	155	(32.6%)
Tokens differing in all three versions	75	(15.8%)
of those, non-Romani loanwords	31	(6.5%)

eastern and central Europe. Naturally, modern elaborate texts will show a different picture, but the degree of lexical awareness and lexical adaptability among adults will differ as well.

4. ACTION-RELATED FUNCTIONS OF CODIFICATION

Acquisition of literacy and education, and the general rewards of literacy, are all connected inherently to the respective majority state language. Writing their native language is therefore likely to be a conscious choice for Romani speakers in most situations. When considering which codification concepts are more likely to gain popular acceptance, language planners must therefore be concerned with the sum of personal motivations that attract speakers to experiment with a written form of their language. I consider 'motivations' to be those action-related goals and intentions which speakers of the language pursue when seeking to transpose orality into writing.

4.1 The communicative function

Igla (1991: 88–9) claims that for the majority of speakers, Romani is a language that cannot be written and that writing is always associated with the majority contact language. While this is true in many situations, political events in recent years have led to the emergence of contexts of action where writing in Romani is indeed the most efficient means of communicating. In highlighting the communicative function among various functions of Romani writing, however, I acknowledge that communicating beyond the barriers of a speech situation is not necessarily the prototypical motivation for speakers to write.

I define the communicative function as an attempt by a writer to initiate, through writing, an action or series of actions on the part of an addressee, or to enhance the addressee's knowledge in such a way that would evoke or facilitate a new course of action on his part. The choice of Romani for communicative functions in this sense is often a negative one, that is, it is a choice triggered by the lack of opportunity to communicate orally, as well as by the lack of an alternative written language shared by speaker-turning-writer and addressee. Though perhaps trivial in other situations, such considerations are crucial in a context where all speakers are bilingual, where writing is always acquired in a second language, and where interaction outside the immediate community (i.e. with Roma from other towns or districts) has usually been restricted to rather accidental face-to-face encounters.

Writing for strictly communicative purposes is usually a reflection of new institutions in Romani life. One such example is petitioning Romani associations. In example (1) a Romani asylum-seeker from Macedonia living in Germany is appealing to the president of a Romani association to assist him and his fellow immigrants in obtaining permission to stay in Germany:

- (1) . . . a avera gele sa kerde uba prifum pa aka sem ko 13 april ko rathaus te prodolzín mange o doldumi pa penen mange saj te denman apsigon . . . molisarav tuke ke kava lil te odgovorisareman ge da li si sansa te pomozisare amenge e romenge.

‘. . . and the others all went and had an *Überprüfung* (German: examination) and so now I am (required to go) to the *Rathaus* (German: Town Hall) on April 13 so that they can extend my *Duldung* (German: visa) but they tell me that it is possible that they give me a *Abschiebung* (German: deportation order) . . . I am asking you in this letter to inform me whether there is a chance that you can help us, the Rom.’

It is obvious that the writer has had no training in writing Romani, and that he is not inspired directly by any of the standardization concepts. The letter is produced on a standard typewriter, with no attempt to amend basic characters, for example, in order to differentiate /s/ in *sa* ‘all’ and /š/ in *šaj* ‘possible’. Words borrowed from southern Slavic (Serbian, Macedonian) which form part of the writer’s dialect (*prodolž-* ‘to prolong’, *odgovori-* ‘to advise’, *dali* ‘whether’) are used freely as part of the Romani structure, although the addressee is not a speaker of those languages and his dialect is unlikely to show similar loans. German technical and institutional terms are integrated as well in accordance with their pronunciation by the writer, with no attempt to reconstruct German orthography. No regularity is attempted in word boundaries: *penen mange* ‘they-tell me-DATIVE’ appears alongside *odgovorisareman ge* ‘(you) help-me DATIVE’. In short, codification is entirely spontaneous. Nevertheless, it is perceived as both essential, and evidently as natural, for the communicative goal that the writer is pursuing.

The fall of the iron curtain has seen the establishment of links between Romani associations in Europe, with regular meetings devoted to various aspects of Romani society, in particular civil rights issues. In many of these, language issues were not on the agenda, but Romani is nevertheless used as a working language in oral deliberations as well as in paperwork in preparation for the conferences. Example (2) is taken from an invitation letter sent by a Romani association in Budapest in 1992:

- (2) akharipesko lil . . . so pelas pe zhi akanak . . . so keresa pe konferencia . . . Arakhdyipe, registracio 16.00 chasestar. HOTEL MAGISTER, Budapest . . . (forosko rig: Békásmeqyer).

‘Letter of invitation . . . what has happened so far . . . what we shall do at the meeting . . . Arrival, registration from 16.00 hours. HOTEL MAGISTER Budapest . . . (Neighborhood/district: Békásmeqyer).’

Here too, codification serves a communicative purpose in announcing the event, summarizing the background, and providing practical instructions. The writers choose their own Lovari dialect and the system of orthographic representation in common usage in Hungary (see above), which they apply consistently. At the same time they avoid Hungarian loanwords. For

institution-related terminology, there appears to be a conscious choice in favour of internationalisms (*konferencia, registracio*), and ‘soft’ neologisms, based on compositions of everyday lexical items (*akharipesko lil* lit. ‘letter of calling’, *forosko rig* lit. ‘side of town’) and nominalizations of common verbs (*arakhdyipe* ‘find-ing’). A draft proposal by a delegate from Germany attending this same conference includes the following, from a sketch for the executive body of a new Romani association:

- (3) Mai but sor ai šaipe . . . deš ĝene . . . mai but wrama worbaski
 ‘More power and authority . . . ten persons . . . more discussion time’

The writer resorts to German orthography, representing /v/ as *w* and both /z/ in /zor/ ‘strength’ and /s/ in /vorbaski/ ‘of-word’ as *s*, while at the same time drawing on international, academic-type spelling for /š/, and inspired by the latter, creating his own character Ĝ for /dž/. Terminology is again created by ad hoc composition in *wrama worbaski* ‘time of-word’, nominalization from *šaj* ‘possible’ > *šaipe* ‘authority’, and semantic extension in *sor* ‘strength’ > ‘(institutional) power’.

A new type of private correspondence in Romani has emerged following the establishment of Romani e-mail networks in the mid-1990s. Initially, such fora attracted mainly civil rights activists or language specialists, but by now popular participation from Roms of various backgrounds is registered. Naturally, participants share interest in Romani political affairs, and flagging national or ethnic identity is their common denominator. E-mail networks nevertheless establish new communicative contexts where action-oriented writing between strangers is common:

- (4) . . . amen le dui trabul te maladivas. kai san tu ande che gau? Me sim ando New York, sim maritime, sima trin chiave thai sim Romni anda i Yugoslavia
 ‘. . . the two of us should meet. Where are you in which town? I am in New York, I am married, I have three sons and I am a Romani woman from Yugoslavia.’

Technical restrictions on electronic mail format, if nothing else, are responsible for the avoidance of diacritics by this non-linguist, who nevertheless adopts the academic notation of aspiration in *thai* ‘and’ in a ‘moderate adjustment’ of an English-based spelling.

4.2 The emblematic function

I define as ‘emblematic’ texts which are not intended to enhance the addressee’s knowledge in order to evoke action on his part, but rather to elicit emotional identification on the part of the addressee with the aesthetic symbolism of the text in its particular language-external context. A continuum can be postulated from emblematic functions at a micro level, encompassing single words or phrases inserted into non-Romani linguistic

environments, to those at a macro level, with entire texts or even entire publications figuring as emotional symbols. Examples of micro-emblematic usage of written Romani are dozens of Romani titles of periodicals published largely in the respective majority language, perhaps with the odd contribution in Romani, by Romani cultural and political associations mostly in central and eastern Europe. Titles in Romani are also common in cultural productions such as collections of songs or CDs. They usually appear in a spelling based on that of the majority language, or else with moderate adjustment. Such titles flag the cultural context of the publication and usually have no content-relevance. For many authors they nevertheless constitute a first attempt to write Romani, and so they urge contemplation on codification. More elaborate emblematic uses are CDs that also document the texts of the songs.

A further example is the following commemoration text found along with a German translation at the exit from an exhibition on the Romani Holocaust at the Documentation Centre on German Sinti and Roma, run by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg:

- (5) I Rikerpaske ap u Sinti de Roma, mare Mulenge, gei weian maschke 1933 de 1945 mardo an u Manuschengromarepen.
 'In memory of the Sinti and Roma, our dead, who were murdered in the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945.'

German orthography, including capitalization, is used here; the text also includes a 'soft' neologism, *Manuschengromarepen* literally 'the killing of people', for 'Holocaust'.

Macro-usages of emblematic texts are Gospel translations, which are seldom read in full but which display religious commitment, or, on the part of missionaries who produce them, sincerity in approaching the specific cultural context of the Rom. Literary translations, such as that by Leksa Manuš of the Indian epic *Ramayana*, are often a token of the translators' abilities to transpose a text into Romani, or in turn of the richness of the Romani language which allows translation of serious material, and it is this effect of emotional appreciation, rather than actual entertainment through reading, which is often intended.

4.3 The mobilizing-rallying function

In contrast with the principle of optimal efficiency which seems to govern codification for both communicative and emblematic purposes, the texts with a mobilizing-rallying function involve a choice among available and accessible options. As mobilizing-rallying functions, I define the shaping of a text in such a way that would demonstrate ideological commitment and political allegiance and identification. This is the case in virtually all text production by the Spanish Romani Union in the artificial variety it calls *Romanó-Kaló*, none of which is expected to be read and understood by an audience of

readers, and most of which (leaflets, circulars) merely accompanies the (original) Spanish version of the text.

Rallying political allegiance is also the salient feature of the employment of Courthiade's alphabet. Indeed, such usage first appears following the decision taken by the Fourth World Romani Congress in April 1990 to adopt the concept. Application thereafter flags the loyalty of text authors who are members of the International Romani Union to the decision-making procedures of the Congress. Thus an address in Romani given by Ian Hancock at an international meeting of Romani political representatives in Mühlheim/Germany in November 1990 was written in the Courthiade alphabet, as were the minutes of a meeting of Romani delegates to an international conference in October 1994, circulated by Romani activist Nicolae Gheorghie from Romania; here is an excerpt:

- (6) maškarthemutne bi-raipne organizàcie . . . butĩ vaš-e Manušíkane
Hakaja p-o maškarthemutno nivo . . .
'international non-governmental organizations . . . human rights activ-
ities at the international level . . .'

One of the larger projects launched under the aegis of the International Romani Union with funding from the Commission of the European Union is the Romani Encyclopaedia, edited by Ian Hancock, for which the Courthiade alphabet and lexical elaboration concept has been chosen (here is an excerpt from an entry, based on a sample in *Interface* 23, 1997):

- (7) E liljača si pašće korri mamáli kaj hurjan biphakaqes mebranança
'The bat is a wingless, nearly blind mammal which flies by means of
membranes'

The political commitment to the Union's 1990 decision is registered beyond the members and projects of the Union itself. Liégeois (1994), in an official Council of Europe publication on Gypsies, devotes a chapter to Language, in which Romani examples appear in the Courthiade alphabet. This even includes citations from the earliest sample of Romani published in 1547 by Andrew Borde, which appear, alongside the original, in what is called 'current Romani' (Liégeois 1994: 43):

- (8) A čhaj!e, da man manro . . . lači rat tuqe!
'Girl, give me bread . . . good night to you!'

Following a series of meetings and draft resolutions on the situation of the Roms in central and eastern Europe, the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) was lobbied intensively by Romani activists from among the Union's members demanding that the spelling of the word 'Roma' should follow the Courthiade alphabet conventions. The CLRAE finally conceded and adopted the notation *rr* into the official English and French (sic.) texts of Recommendation 11 (1995) and Resolution 16 (1995) 'Towards a Tolerant Europe: the Contribution of Roma

(Gypsies)'. Frequent usage of *Rroma* in English is also recorded on Romnet, an electronic mail correspondence network on Romani political issues.

Implementation of the Union's protocol on spelling is thus an acknowledgement of the Union and its decision-making bodies as representatives of the Romani people, and so it constitutes a compensatory recognition of the national aspirations of the Roms; hence its importance to Union activists, and to those in official functions in multilateral organizations who are entrusted with Romani-related projects. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Courthiade alphabet is employed more often by non-native speakers, for whom language also symbolizes conscious identification with the Romani political cause. None of the delegates who signed the 1990 protocol (for a list see Courthiade 1990), with the exception of Courthiade himself, appear to be using this spelling in their own publications, which are not connected to the Union's political work.⁸

4.4 Overlap and emerging functions

Two genres of codified texts in Romani deserve special attention within the pragmatic typology of Romani writing: contributions to political periodicals, and educational material. The first is probably the most productive domain of Romani writing in recent years. It is difficult to estimate the impact that periodical articles have on the Romani public. It would not be unfair however to assert that for the most part, they are perceived as tokens of Romani cultural sovereignty by potential readers who obtain copies of the publications primarily through their membership in, or interaction with, Romani associations. Since almost all Romani articles appear in publications that are bilingual, it is apparent that the emblematic or token effect of contributions in the language is part of the overall conception.

On the other hand, the content of such articles reflects genuine communicative objectives on the part of the writers, who devote space to reports on various affairs of Romani public life. In the case of a recent regular publication entitled *Romano Bulletin* and published by the Czech-based 'Fund of Hope and Understanding' with support from the European Union's PHARE programme, the entire text is in Romani and is devoted to reports on the Fund's activities and analyses. A case for a rallying function can be made for publications which are used to flag an organization's commitment to the cause of cultural revival, as in the case of the Spanish Romani Union's artificial Romani edition *Nevipens Romani*. So far, little attempt can be registered by article authors to relate to the content of other Romani-language contributions, and it is only when such cross-reference becomes evident that one will be able to argue comfortably for the existence of a Romani-language journalism with straightforward communicative functions.

Educational material such as primers, collections of fables and poems, glossaries, and posters of Romani alphabets have been designed and circulated in various countries, notably Czechia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria, Sweden,

Norway, Romania, and Germany. Full information is not available on the success of applying such material in teaching programmes; indeed, regular Romani-language programmes at the school level are non-existent. It seems therefore that the primary objective of such publications is to display, towards the Romani community, the prospect of native language instruction, and to mobilize educational authorities, in turn, to support such aspirations through the allocation of appropriate resources. Nevertheless, from a long-term perspective, educational material might be able to assume functions beyond those identified in the current discussion, in particular the acquisition of skills, linguistic and other.

5. CONCLUSION

The survey presented in the first part of this study testifies to the overwhelmingly regional, decentralized character of Romani codification efforts. The course of recent developments, when viewed in an international comparison, largely supports the idea of a pluralistic standardization process lacking centralized ownership as envisaged by Hübschmannová and Neustupný (1996) for the particular case of Romani in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Romani offers a unique case-study in the mechanisms of decentralized modern language standardization: its dialects are not only diverse but internationally dispersed, and the prospects of political and cultural unification are, despite some current efforts, rather remote. Native literacy, and often access to literacy altogether, are marginal. Standardization has nevertheless become a popular and creative enterprise from which lessons can be learned.

The most salient features of Romani codification are the choice of the immediate spoken variety of the author, and reliance on either moderate or elaborate adjustment of the alphabet used for the national or majority language in the respective country. The position on the continuum from such moderate to elaborate adjustment (or indeed onwards to the 'no-compromise' strategy) is in most cases a function of the distance between the national alphabet drawn upon, and the international conventions used in modern Romani linguistics for the purposes of academic documentation. This shows that writers, while searching for practical and convenient solutions from among the technical resources immediately accessible to them, also grant consideration to the distinctive phonological features of their language and to notation in scientific works. Moreover, it suggests that to some degree, awareness of the international dispersion of Romani figures even in regional codification attempts. As a result one can note the emergence of diverse, though in many features compatible, writing systems.

Current codification is largely pursued for emblematic purposes, but communicative functions are becoming widespread with the increasing importance of institutions in community life. It is in connection with communicative functions that elaboration strategies can be observed. In

most cases, writers rely on spontaneous elaboration of a type characterized above as the creation of 'soft neologisms': the semantic extension of existing everyday vocabulary, nominalization of common verbs, and nominal compositions. Authors drawing on language engineering and language design usually do so in texts employed for mobilizing-rallying functions.

The fact that codification is only partly, perhaps even marginally, employed for strictly communicative purposes should not however downplay the significance of current codification attempts. On the contrary, this study suggests that for a dispersed stateless language such as Romani, emblematic and rallying functions are essential to spreading interest in native literacy. They appear to be just as essential for obtaining support from external resources, which is necessary in order to expand native literacy to domains such as education or media.

(Revised version received March 1999)

NOTES

- 1 Other Romani-speaking communities exist in North and South America and in Australia.
- 2 These include a bilingual primer for Romani children designed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, and a Romani alphabet published in the Czech Republic. No details are available on the actual implementation of this material in the education system, and it is likely that they are only used marginally and only upon the personal initiative of individual teachers.
- 3 A *gadžo*, pl. *gadže* is a person of non-Romani descent, as opposed to *rom* pl. *roma* which is the autonym of most groups.
- 4 For example, the Association of German Sinti and Roma in Düsseldorf responded angrily to a suggestion by the Ministry of Education of the State of Upper-Rhine Westphalia to introduce a series of Romani language primers written in three different dialects for voluntary use in classrooms with Romani pupils. The Association stated, among other things, that Romani was an 'orally transmitted language which should not be codified' (letter by Roman Franz, Executive Director, from 14 February 1997).
- 5 Leading Romani political activists Mirga and Gheorghe write about the introduction of manuals for teaching Romani (1997: 32): 'How will it enable these children to advance beyond their parents' status in the future? What prospects will it open to them in a modern world ruled by achievement and competition?'
- 6 For example, Romani linguists L. N. Tcherenkov and M. F. Heinschink, in a privately circulated paper in 1995, as well as Iglă (1991: 87) and Acton (1995: 12).
- 7 The corpus drawn upon here consists of 12 booklets, which include between 10–25 sentences, each of which appears in three dialectal versions. The total number of lexical tokens indicated in the table provides an idea as regards the degree of lexical complexity represented in the sample.
- 8 Kenrick's (1996: 119) claim that the alphabet is used in the journal *Patrin* is incorrect; the journal uses acute accents for *é, ś, ź*, but none of the other symbols.

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