

Research article

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ROMANI TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Studies highlight the potential of translation and interpreting as tools for social inclusion (Aguilar 2023; Pérez-González 2012; Tahirović-Sijerčić 2018; Todorova 2020). By facilitating communication between Roma and non-Roma populations, translators and interpreters can play a critical role in overcoming language barriers to education, healthcare, and other public services. This article will further expand the examination of Romani translation and interpreting as a social justice tool, allowing for alternative spaces (Baker 2013) for economic and social inclusion while at the same time advancing environmental protection. The activities of Romani interpreters and translators will be studied through the ethical lenses of engagement (Boéri 2023).

Keywords: Romani, interpreting, environment, inclusion, North Macedonia

1. Introduction

In the European Union (EU), there are at least 158 minorities and at least 70 minority languages, representing about 7% of the population (Videsott 2023).¹ The Roma, with approximately 6 million citizens living in the EU and 10-12 million across Europe overall, constitute Europe's largest ethnic minority (European Commission 2020). Romani, as a European non-territorial minority language, has established a firm presence in the public domain over the past decades. However, Europe still lacks clear-cut, research-based answers for the use of effective translation policies due to a lack of comprehensive research. Within this, EU policies need to reflect the specific situation of the Romani language. Because of the specificities as a non-territorial predominantly verbal language rarely considered in translators' education, Romani faces a specific subset of difficulties in terms of preservation of linguistic diversity and non-discrimination through provision of translation and interpreting. In 1983, the Council of Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe recommended that "the Romani language and culture be used and accorded the same respect as regional languages and cultures and those of other minorities" (Matras, 2015). Out of 25 countries which have ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), 15 have officially recognised Romani as a "minority language traditionally present on their territory" (Council of Europe, n.d.). Launched in 2022 by the Council of Europe, the Romani-Plurilingual Policy Experimentation promotes Roma pupils' inclusion through multilingual education in three European countries, and the Council of Europe has also developed a Curriculum Framework for Romani (Council of Europe 2024).

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in promoting social justice for marginalized groups like the Roma people in Europe. There are a number of Roma-led NGOs and civic groups that advocate for Roma rights and inclusion in areas like education, employment, health, anti-discrimination, etc. Many CSOs advocate for Roma rights and inclusion at the policy level in Europe. For example, the European Roma Rights Centre litigates cases of discrimination, provides policy advice, and publishes reports on Roma issues. CSOs also run programs and

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services directly supporting Roma communities. This includes things like education, vocational training, healthcare, anti-discrimination legal aid, housing assistance, advocacy, and community empowerment. However, both governments and civil society groups are frequently critiqued for the lack of effectiveness, pointing out the need for greater Roma participation and voice in activities and policy-making (Bhabha et al. 2017; Magazzini et al. 2019; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2022). Translation is essential for communication across linguistic backgrounds in development work, but has rarely been considered crucial. It has focused more on communicating project results rather than incorporating local populations (Todorova and Ahrens 2020). Translation into local languages is ad hoc, often done in-house without professional translators, and little translation happens from local languages back into the dominant language (Tesseur 2023). In order for translation to move from just transferring meaning to a process of mediating concepts between global and local it requires engaging grassroots actors by providing translation and interpreting services.

This article examines the potential of Romani translation and interpreting to promote social inclusion and justice for the Roma community, focusing on an EU candidate country with a significant Roma community, North Macedonia. It expands the study of translation and interpreting as a social justice tool allowing for alternative spaces (Baker 2013) for economic and social inclusion at the same time advancing environmental protection. After providing a context on the Roma population and language rights in Europe and in North Macedonia, the article presents findings from a survey of civic organizations' perspectives on the use of Romani translation services. The contextual background outlines the unique challenges and language discrimination faced by the Roma people across Europe. The background section proceeds to give relevant details on the demographics, living conditions, and language rights of the Roma in North Macedonia. It then explores possibilities for enhancing social inclusion of the Roma through translation, with a focus on environmental advocacy.

The discussion in the article will be based on an online survey of eleven diverse civic organizations and their self-reported use and need for Romani translation. The discussion examines possibilities for greater social inclusion of the Roma in environmental activism by elevating their voices through translation. It also

summarizes how Romani translation and interpreting can serve as an important tool for empowerment, inclusion, and social justice for the marginalized Roma community.

2. Romani language rights

With the Treaty of Lisbon, the protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities is a value on which the EU is founded, and that is common to all member states but has also become an EU accession criterion. The Roma population is present throughout Europe both as a domestic and migrant minority. Thus, the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 was an initiative of 12 European countries to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of the Roma minority across the region and represents the first multinational project in Europe to actively enhance the lives of Roma. Spain is among the 12 countries taking part in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, whereas Finland is one of the countries that have recognised Romani as a minority language. In 2020, the European Commission (EC) recognising that "Europe still has a long way to go to achieve real equality for Roma" adopted a new 10-year plan (under the EU Roma Strategic Framework) to support Roma in the EU, with seven areas of focus: equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, health, and housing (European Commission 2020b).

Spain has made significant strides in improving the situation of its Roma population, notably through the Acceder program, launched in 2000. This program focuses on improving the employment situation of the Roma through training and intermediation with companies. Since its inception, it has helped more than 22 thousand Roma people find employment (FSG 2015). On a broader scale, the 2011 European Union's Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (European Commission, n.d.) asked all EU countries to create strategies to improve access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing for the Roma. Some countries have seen success in implementing these strategies, including increased school attendance and improved healthcare access for Roma communities.

Despite these initiatives, the Roma community still faces significant challenges, and much work remains to be done to ensure their full social and economic inclusion. The post-Decade of Roma Inclusion period has seen continued efforts,

both at the national and EU levels, to improve the living conditions and social acceptance of the Roma. These include measures aimed at promoting education, healthcare access, housing, and employment opportunities for the Roma, with the ultimate goal of achieving their full social integration and economic empowerment. Roma organizations like ERGO Network have coordinated internationally to fight discrimination and advocate for Roma rights. The Roma community in Europe still face numerous challenges and obstacles. Many Roma people live in extreme poverty, often in segregated and marginalized communities. Unemployment rates are significantly higher among the Roma than the general population, which exacerbates poverty and social exclusion.

One way to overcome these obstacles is through translation and interpretation into minority languages, which helps enable participation and gives voice to marginalized groups in civic life, education, and government services (Todorova and Marais 2022). Terminology that is inclusive and respectful of diversity helps create an environment of belonging regardless of gender, race, disability or other factors. Multilingual communication, translated documents and campaigns raise awareness of social issues and rights among linguistically diverse communities (Tesseur et al. 2022). Roma communities are working to reclaim their historical narrative, traditionally dominated by non-Roma perspectives. Through linguistic research of Romani's origins and evolution, Roma people are piecing together their collective history despite lacking formal educational systems in their language. While Romani remains primarily a home-spoken language, with most Roma also speaking their national languages, modern technology and social media have created new spaces for Roma connections and communication, particularly through audiovisual formats that align with Romani's oral tradition. Representation of minority languages and perspectives in media and literature helps make their concerns and culture visible and mainstream (Sterk 2022). Platforms that give equal space to non-dominant languages validate those languages and cultures. Linguistic codes or practices that stigmatize groups can be challenged and changed through awareness and education. Terminology reflecting values like social justice, human rights and diversity helps shape mindsets and normalize these concepts. Language preservation and promotion elevates the status of indigenous/minority languages and affirms identity (Sterk 2022).

Contemporary issues in translation and interpreting into the Romani language, also known as Roma or Romany language, encompass various aspects such as linguistic challenges and cultural considerations. These issues arise due to the unique characteristics of the Romani language and the specific context in which translation and interpreting take place. One of the linguistic challenges in translating and interpreting into Romani is the mixing of languages. Romani is often spoken in bilingual or multilingual communities, leading to the development of mixed Romani languages (Adamou and Granqvist 2014). This mixing can create complexities in translation and interpreting, as conflicting processes of language shift and language maintenance influence the linguistic choices made by speakers (Adamou and Granqvist 2014). Cultural considerations also play a significant role in translation and interpreting into Romani. The Romani community has a distinct cultural identity, and their language reflects their cultural heritage. Translators and interpreters need to be sensitive to the cultural nuances and specific terminology used within the Roma community (Tileagă 2005). Additionally, the Romani language itself may have unique expressions, idioms, and intonation patterns that require careful interpretation (Arvaniti 2016).

The Roma, widely dispersed across Europe and the world, speak a diverse set of dialects collectively known as Romani. The translation and interpreting of this language, therefore, is a field of study that is as complex as it is crucial for facilitating communication and promoting social inclusion. A central theme in the literature is the linguistic diversity of Romani (Elšík and Matras 2006). With no standard written form and numerous dialects shaped by centuries of geographical dispersion and interaction with other languages, translation and interpreting in Romani present unique challenges. This diversity can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations even among speakers of different Romani dialects, which emphasizes the need for highly skilled translators and interpreters.

In this context, a key issue is the lack of professionalization in Romani translation and interpreting (Pym et al. 2012). The absence of formal training programs in many regions and the often ad-hoc nature of Romani interpreting, particularly in institutional settings, can result in significant quality variations. This is compounded by the sensitive nature of many interpreting situations, such as in healthcare or legal contexts, where inaccurate translation can have serious

consequences. For example, the Slovak Republic recently published translations of some relevant laws in Ukrainian, Ruthenian, German and Romani (at www.slov-lex.sk). Only in 2018 was the Roma language included in the list of languages in which the Slovak Ministry of Justice can accredit translators or interpreters.² To date, no registered interpreter or translator for this language has been recorded on the list. An unofficial statement from the Ministry said that no state institution had reported a need for a certified interpreter in the Roma language (Štefková and Tužinská 2021).

Despite these challenges, some studies highlight the potential of translation and interpreting as tools for social inclusion (Matras 2005). By facilitating communication between Roma and non-Roma populations, translators and interpreters can play a critical role in overcoming linguistic barriers to education, healthcare, and other public services. Finally, a growing body of literature explores the role of translation and interpreting in preserving and promoting Romani language and culture (Tenser 2006). This includes not only the translation of texts into Romani but also the use of translation in language revitalization efforts.

Additionally, in public service and community interpreting, new research has challenged the “conduit model” by showing that interpreters act as third participants and may play roles like cultural brokers (Todorova 2020). However, codes of ethics still frame such actions as exceptions. In her article, Boéri (2023) concludes that the meta-ethical approach can help harness insights from activist practices to reframe ethical thought beyond modern liberal traditions. This can help steer interpreting ethics towards social justice, empowerment and inclusion.

3. Roma community in North Macedonia

Romani has been recognised as a minority language in several EU member states and candidate countries, among which is North Macedonia. As an EU candidate country, the Republic of North Macedonia represents a notable example for the use of Romani language. The Roma are an ethnic minority in North Macedonia. According to the last census conducted in 2021, the Roma population in North

² For more see <https://www.justice.gov.sk/Stranky/Nase-sluzby/Civilne-pravo/Tlmocnici-a-prekladatelja/Zoznam-tlmo%C4%8Dn%C3%ADckych-a-prekladate%C4%B5sk%C3%BDch-odborov-pod%C4%B5a-jazykov.aspx>.

Macedonia was around 46,433 constituting about 2.53% of the total population. However, some estimates suggest that the actual number may be significantly higher, possibly up to 260,000, as many Roma may avoid official census counts or identify as members of other ethnic communities.

The Roma community in North Macedonia is diverse, with multiple subgroups that speak various dialects of the Romani language as well as Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish. They live throughout the country, but the largest concentrations are in the municipalities of Šuto Orizari (commonly known as Šutka), Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Tetovo, and Skopje. Despite their long history in the region, the Roma in North Macedonia often face significant social and economic challenges. They tend to have higher rates of unemployment, lower levels of educational attainment, and poorer health outcomes compared to the general population. Many Roma live in substandard housing conditions, often in informal settlements that lack basic infrastructure such as water and electricity.

The challenges surrounding literacy and language use faced by ethnic minority groups with the least power and lowest socioeconomic status are often overlooked and under-examined. For example, one of the realities is that Roma people in North Macedonia are still not given the right to receive literacy in their own written language (Rizova et al. 2020) although the country is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which guarantees the right to education, children's own cultural identity, language and values. Although Roma children may not be able to write a story in Macedonian, they can tell it and write it in their native language, Romani (Rizova et al. 2020). However, the members of this marginalized ethnic group are still classified as illiterate according to common international standards and assessments, despite speaking their own language.

One notable aspect of the Roma population in North Macedonia is the existence of the municipality of Šuto Orizari. Located in the capital city of Skopje, Šuto Orizari is the only administrative unit in the world where Roma people constitute a majority and where Romani is an official language. The mayor and many of the municipal councillors are Roma, making Šuto Orizari a unique example of Roma political participation and self-government. North Macedonia is also home to the first television station in the world to broadcast in the Romani language. In addition to the early radio programs in Romani, the television station "TV BTR" started

broadcasting in Šuto Orizari in 1996 and has played a significant role in promoting the Romani language and culture, as well as in advocating for the rights and interests of the Roma community. The internet portal RomaTimes News provides news about Šuto Orizari municipality. Roma language and culture is an elective subject in 11 primary schools in Macedonia, while the subject does not exist in the secondary schools (Gavriloski 2013).

According to the law, the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia who belong to the Roma community can use their own language in a municipality in which they are represented by at least 20%, such as the municipality of Šuto Orizari. Still, the Roma ethnic community faces challenges in employment, language barriers, and underrepresentation. The government has undertaken initiatives like Roma information centres and programs for skills training, employment, and microfinancing to support Roma integration. However, in 2023, Roma unemployment remained at 64% compared to the 17,5% national average, while 25% of the Roma population engages in informal work (Carovska 2023). Roma people are significantly underrepresented as employees in government institutions, with few working in ministries, courts, museums, and schools. There is only one Roma judge, and one Roma employee at the Public Prosecutor's office (Martinovska et al. 2018).

The right to use the language of parties and other participants in proceedings before the state authorities is regulated by the laws on criminal, civil and other judicial procedures, i.e. the Law on the General Administrative Procedure. The right to free translation (including interpreting) for a person who does not understand or speak the language in which the procedure is conducted is prescribed by the Law on Criminal Procedure and the Law on the Use of the Languages for a language spoken by at least 20% of the citizens in the Republic of Macedonia and in the units of the local self-government. Although there are no comprehensive numerical indicators for the degree of use of the Romani language in court proceedings, it seems that this is not a common practice. One of the possible explanations is that "the translation is performed by certified court interpreters, and it seems that there is a lack of court interpreters for the Romani language" (Gavriloski 2013, 32). This makes it almost impossible for persons who use the Romani language to use their native language in a court procedure. Language barriers also lead to injustice, as

evidenced by a case where a Roma man confessed to a crime he did not commit due to insufficient Macedonian language skills and lack of an interpreter (Martinovska et al. 2018, 14). Additionally, at least in one criminal procedure, the right of Roma refugees was disputed due to the lack of possibility for the defendants to use their own language (Gavriloski 2013, 32). It was further claimed (Martinovska et al. 2018) that in a case before the Main court Skopje 1, after persistent insistence, the judge in question accepted a Romani language interpreter because the parties knew very little Macedonian. On the other hand, the experience of lawyers from the Štip area is that there were no problems to provide interpreting for the Roma defendants who do not understand Macedonian, but these situations were particularly rare in Štip as the majority of the Roma population uses the Macedonian language (Martinovska et al. 2018). To address these issues, the Council of Europe has recommended hiring more qualified Roma language translators and interpreters in administrative bodies, as well as providing civil servants with greater Roma language skills.

Overall, there is a need to elevate Roma voices and representation across sectors, shift collective narratives, and break down language barriers through translation and interpretation to achieve transformative justice. The government of North Macedonia, along with various international bodies and NGOs, have implemented a number of initiatives to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of the Roma minority. These efforts include programs aimed at increasing Roma access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities, as well as measures to combat discrimination and promote Roma cultural heritage. However, progress has been slow and uneven, and many challenges remain. Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for the Roma continues to be a key issue for North Macedonia as the country pursues its goals of economic development and European integration.

This article will further expand on the use of Romani translation and interpreting in civil society organisations as a social justice tool allowing for alternative spaces (Baker 2013) for economic and social inclusion at the same time advancing environmental protection. The activities of Romani interpreters and translators will be studied through the ethical lenses of engagement (Boéri 2023). The discussion

will be based on an online survey of civic organizations in North Macedonia, supplemented with semi-structured interviews.

4. Needs for translation and interpreting in Romani language

To understand perspectives on the need for Romani translation services, an online survey of civic organizations in North Macedonia was conducted. The survey questionnaire consisted of 9 open-ended, closed-ended, and Likert scale questions designed to gauge the respondents' interaction with the Roma community, utilization of the Romani language, and views on translation needs.

The survey was distributed to a purposeful sample of civic organizations working across diverse sectors including environmental advocacy, legal aid, cultural preservation, education, women's rights, and youth engagement. Purposeful sampling, widely used in qualitative research, is a method where researchers deliberately select participants based on specific characteristics, experiences, or criteria relevant to the population of interest. In the survey, the sampling criteria included civic organizations not only working in the capital but also organizations from the north and south of the country, national as well as local. In order to reach organizations engaged with the Roma community throughout the country, the survey was disseminated through national CSOs that serve as Foundations and grants administrators. In total, 11 civil society organizations participated, active in different locations throughout the territory of North Macedonia, including Skopje, Štip, Kumanovo, Makedonska Kamenica, Resen, Sveti Nikole, and Tetovo, with two civic organizations located in the capital, Skopje, that are active on the whole territory of the Republic. Most of the respondents, or about 85%, noted that their organization provides services to the Roma ethnic community in their immediate municipality or on the territory of the whole country.

To allow for qualitative insights, the survey also included open-ended questions asking about challenges, recommendations, and organization-specific strategies related to Romani translation.

4.1 Interaction with Romani speakers and language proficiency

The research has revealed that a significant portion of organizations do not effectively communicate with individuals who speak Romani as their native language. In fact, approximately 42% of these organizations fail to engage in such communication at all. Another 42% engage infrequently, while only 16% engage on a regular basis. The lack of communication is likely attributed to a limited proficiency of staff members in the Romani language. In fact, as many as 50% of staff members report a very poor level of proficiency, while the remaining 42% report a poor level of proficiency, with only 8% reporting good knowledge of Romani among their staff.

The lack of effective communication with individuals who speak Romani as their native language can have significant implications for organizations. It can lead to decreased trust and loyalty among Romani speakers, which can ultimately impact the success of the organization. A lack of communication can also result in misunderstandings, errors, and missed opportunities. To address this issue, organizations should invest in language training for staff members who interact with Romani speakers. They should also consider hiring bilingual staff members or working with language service providers to ensure effective communication with all individuals, regardless of their native language. By doing so, organizations can demonstrate their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and improve their overall effectiveness and success.

4.2. Use of translators or interpreters

Less than a quarter of the 11 surveyed organizations use Romani translators or interpreters when providing services to the Roma community, of which more than a half (55%) very rarely and one third rarely utilize these services, with only one organization reporting using translation services frequently. As one respondent noted: "We work with a Roma municipality, Šuto Orizari. When we have financial opportunities, we translate informational and promotional materials into the Romani language." As Šuto Orizari is a municipality with a majority Roma population this means that those who are not fully fluent in Macedonian or English are often left out and not reached by the development activities of the civic sector.

The fact that only 25% of organizations use Romani translators or interpreters in providing services to the Roma community highlights the need for greater linguistic and cultural sensitivity. The respondents' comments suggest that there may be a lack of awareness among organizations about the importance of providing services in the Romani language. This may lead to a sense of exclusion and marginalization among the Roma community, which could have negative social and economic impacts. Therefore, it is important for organizations to recognize the value of linguistic diversity and take steps towards more inclusive practices.

4.3 Preservation and promotion of Romani language

When asked about strategies to preserve and promote the use of the Romani language, six respondents indicated no strategy or no perceived need. This seems to reflect a broader trend where the Romani language is often side-lined in favour of Macedonian or English. As one respondent put it, "[w]e don't have such a need because all the projects we design, and implement are in Macedonian or English".

Based on the responses received, it can be inferred that there is a lack of awareness and importance given to the preservation and promotion of the Romani language. This could lead to a gradual decline in the usage of the language, and ultimately, the loss of a valuable cultural heritage. It is important to recognize the significance of the Romani language and take necessary measures to ensure its survival. This could include initiatives such as language courses, cultural events, and the development of resources for language learning. By actively promoting the use of the Romani language, we can help preserve this unique and valuable aspect of our cultural diversity.

4.4 Challenges and recommendations

The challenges cited by the organizations mainly revolve around funding and the lack of need for Romani translation. One respondent identified the need for "sufficient funds to provide translation".

In terms of recommendations for improving the use of translation and interpreting for greater social inclusion of the Roma community, respondents highlighted the need for appropriately educated translators and increased fieldwork

and communication with the Roma community. One respondent stressed that “in regions where there is a need for translation and interpreting organizations should engage educated translators who can respond to this need”. Another respondent recommended:

It is necessary to first consult the Roma community about the challenges they face when (not) using their mother tongue. It is also useful to consult with our partners from the municipality and civil society organizations with which we cooperate. Based on the needs of the community itself, solutions should be found on how to use the translation for greater involvement of the Roma community.

It is important to point out that two civic organizations included in the survey that are specifically aiming towards Roma education and social inclusion show different attitude towards the use of translation. Most of the team in these two organizations are from the Roma ethnic community and speak the Romani language. One has a graduate translator in the main operational team who usually translates the written materials. In situations when the professional translator is not able to respond to all the translation needs due to the volume of work duties, they report that they hire external translators who are mostly members of the organization and have other professional backgrounds. In this particular organization, the Romani language is used in meetings with the community. Additionally, most of their written publications, reports, content on social networks, and the organization’s website are provided in Romani, in addition to Macedonian and English. Their recommendation for further use of Romani language to secure social inclusion of this vulnerable community include:

The use of the Roma language should be promoted at all events and publications, especially when it concerns the Roma community, and especially by government institutions, especially when they promote access and information to a certain right and service, while also making sure that the language is adapted to the target group to which they are addressed. Respecting the prices for translation services in the Romani language due to the characteristic and specificity of the language itself. Users of services should understand that the Romani language in itself is quite specific and special, and realistically not everyone can translate and that is why they should appreciate the work as well. Additionally, the University should recognize the Romani language and introduce a separate department or direction, at the very least, the Romani language as an optional subject should be included in the programs in the long

term. This will allow for greater promotion of the Romani language translators themselves in public.

The challenges faced by the Roma community largely revolve around funding. To address this issue, it is important to provide sufficient funds for translation and interpreting services. Additionally, the use of appropriately educated translators and increased communication with the Roma community can greatly improve the use of translation and interpreting for greater social inclusion of the Roma community. It is also important to consult with the Roma community to understand the challenges they face when not using their mother tongue.

5. Possibilities for social inclusion

Contemporary translation studies scholarship has interrogated the politics of environmental language and knowledge production, surfacing the marginalization of minority ecocultures under dominant conservation frameworks. For example, Østmo and Law's (2018) examination unspools a "colonial encounter" in Norway whereby mainstream policies criminalizing indigenous Sámi fishing methods suppressed situated indigenous knowledges and ontologies, while imposing dominant scientific dictates of environmental governance. By elucidating the colonality of environmental language and re-centering subjugated indigenous terminologies through translation, they model more pluralistic pathways for decolonial environmental ethics and policymaking.

Relatedly, Solomonian and Di Ruggiero's timely work (2021) elucidates translation as a radical tool to visibilize subaltern environmental perspectives and reconfigure hegemonic ecological narratives that engender climate inaction. They richly prescribe engaged climate research and communication praxis that mobilizes translation to amplify excluded voices, leverage bilingual expertise, and synthesize intercultural understandings, toward transformative environmental justice. Zooming into the Macedonian context, Todorova (2018) astutely diagnoses English linguistic imperialism as a colonial continuum within the domestic environmental sector. The unmitigated influx of English loanwords and insider jargon fosters public alienation and distrust, undermining civic environmental engagement (Todorova and Ahrens, 2021). Todorova (2022) advocates the need to cultivate multilingual environmental vocabularies that resonate locally, through trans-lingual solidarity.

Indeed, translation into minoritized languages like Romani could spur radical openings for environmental organizing and policymaking. As Barbier and Burgess (2017) have theorized, holistic sustainability praxis demands pursuing the intertwined goals of ecological integrity, economic justice and sociocultural flourishing. In this vein, translation enables substantive intercultural solidarity between environmentalists and disadvantaged groups like the Roma, opening alternative pathways for mutual learning, leadership and livelihoods. This socio-environmental role of translation aligns with conceptualizations of pluriversal sustainable development that weave together ecological balance with economic sufficiency and sociocultural equity, as Pope et al. (2021) synthesize.

Environmental racism against Roma communities is a widespread structural problem in Central and Eastern Europe. They are often denied access to basic environmental services (water, sanitation, waste collection) and forced to live in polluted/hazardous areas (Heidegger and Weise 2020). These poor environmental conditions lead to increased health risks, less access to healthcare than majority populations, and increased vulnerability during health crises (e.g., COVID-19). These environmental inequalities are not a result of poverty but rather a root cause of exclusion that deepens social inequalities and poverty (Heidegger and Weise 2020). EU efforts to promote Roma inclusion have largely failed, with the European Commission acknowledging their first Framework as an “inexcusable failure” (Rorke 2023).

For instance, informal waste picking furnishes crucial survival income for impoverished Roma communities in North Macedonia. However, as Jovanovska (personal communication, Zoom interview in 2021) incisively details, the absence of Romani translation in formal recycling training and sectors precludes marginalized Roma citizens from accessing dignified environmental employment and leadership. Incorporating Romani translation could thus generate interconnected benefits – economically and socially empowering subaltern Roma communities through cultivated ecocultural literacy, while mobilizing their situated epistemes to shape localization solutions for sustainable participatory waste management.

Indeed, the broader shortage of Romani environmental translation entrenches overlapping environmental, social, economic and epistemic injustices along intersecting axes of linguistic and ethnic marginality. Excluded from scientific

environmental knowledge production and policy decisions in their own language, Roma communities are deprived of environmental learning opportunities and leadership platforms to tackle ecological threats disproportionately impacting their health and livelihoods. This upholds dependence on precarious waste picking and perpetuates intergenerational poverty. Enhancing Romani translation would enable participatory, decolonial sustainability pathways. It fosters trust-based solidarity between activists and marginalized Roma communities. Rectifying minority linguistic exclusion remains imperative for nurturing transformative environmental justice paradigms that weave together ecological regeneration, economic sufficiency, and sociocultural pluralism.

Indeed, the broader shortage of Romani environmental translation entrenches overlapping environmental, social, economic and epistemic injustices along intersecting axes of linguistic and ethnic marginality. Excluded from scientific environmental knowledge production and policy decisions in their own language, Roma communities are deprived of environmental learning opportunities and leadership platforms to tackle ecological threats disproportionately impacting their health and livelihoods. This upholds dependence on precarious waste picking and perpetuates intergenerational poverty. Enhancing Romani translation would enable participatory, decolonial sustainability pathways. It fosters trust-based solidarity between activists and marginalized Roma communities. Rectifying minority linguistic exclusion remains imperative for nurturing transformative environmental justice paradigms that weave together ecological regeneration, economic sufficiency, and sociocultural pluralism.

Enhancing Roma participation in environmental initiatives through translated information and training could have significant benefits for improving education, employability, and other social welfare aims. Environmental programs offer opportunities for adult education, skills development, and formal sector jobs that have typically been unavailable to marginalized Roma citizens. Equipping Roma communities with greater environmental awareness, green technical skills, and access to conservation jobs would promote sustainable livelihoods and economic inclusion. At the same time, incorporating Roma voices in environmental decision-making could lead to more locally-attuned policies that better protect Roma health from ecological hazards. In these interlinking ways, efforts to increase Roma

participation in the environmental sector through translation demonstrate how enhancing language access and social inclusion across one area can create positive ripple effects in others.

6. Conclusions

The survey findings reveal a significant gap in the use and promotion of the Romani language among organizations serving the Roma community in North Macedonia. Although a majority of organizations provide services to this community, the use of Romani language translators and interpreters is minimal. There is a clear opportunity for professional training programs for Romani translators and interpreters, despite mixed views on their perceived usefulness. Furthermore, greater effort is needed to engage the Roma community in dialogue about language use and to secure adequate funding for translation services. As the Romani language is a crucial element of the community's cultural identity, these steps are essential for promoting greater social inclusion.

The survey findings highlight the need for greater attention and investment towards promoting the use of the Romani language among organizations serving the Roma community. The lack of utilization of the language, translators, and interpreters by these organizations is indicative of a significant gap in cultural understanding and sensitivity towards the community's needs. Providing professional training programs for Romani translators and interpreters can help bridge this gap and foster greater communication and inclusion. It is also important to engage the Roma community in conversations about language use and secure adequate funding for translation services to promote social inclusion and preserve their cultural identity.

The survey results imply that there is a significant communication barrier between organizations providing services to the Roma community and the community itself. This barrier is mainly due to the lack of Romani translators or interpreters. The findings also suggest that organizations need to improve their language services and cultural competency training to better serve the needs of the Roma community. Furthermore, the self-assessment of staff proficiency in the Romani language by these organizations further confirms the need for such improvements. Overall, the survey underscores the importance of addressing

language and cultural barriers to provide better services to marginalized communities.

The study has several limitations that could be addressed in future research. The purposive sampling method yielded a small sample size of 11 organizations. While this allowed gathering in-depth perspectives from civil society groups engaged with the Roma community, the sample is not statistically representative of all such organizations in North Macedonia. The self-reported survey format also presents a risk of social desirability bias in responses. To complement the survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with additional stakeholders, including environmental activists and Romani interpreters and translators. However, this still represents a very small qualitative sample. The survey and interviews being conducted only in the Macedonian language by the author, a native speaker, enabled gathering authentic perspectives but also required translation into English for analysis and reporting. As with any translation, nuances may unintentionally be lost or altered.

While these limitations preclude generalizing the results, the study offers valuable initial insights into the research gap on Romani translation in North Macedonia. Further research could build on this foundation through: a large-scale survey with probability sampling and randomized participation to improve representation; additional qualitative methods like focus groups and ethnographic observation to allow more in-depth investigation; engaging the Roma community directly in participatory research to centre their perspectives and needs; including more translators and interpreters as key informants to understand challenges and goals; having multiple bilingual researchers collaborate on conducting, translating and analysing data to minimize bias. This enhanced methodological rigor would strengthen the research quality and credibility. While not without limitations, this study provides a useful starting point to elucidate the need for greater attention to Romani translation for promoting social inclusion and justice.

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PREVOĐENJE NA ROMSKI JEZIK KAO NAČIN OSTVARIVANJA SOCIJALNE UKLJUČENOSTI I PRAVDE

Sažetak

Prethodna istraživanja ističu da se pismeno i usmeno prevođenje mogu koristiti pri ostvarivanju socijalne uključenosti (Aguilar 2023; Pérez-González 2012; Tahirović-Sijerčić 2018; Todorova 2020). Olakšavanjem komunikacije između romske i neromske populacije, prevoditelji mogu igrati ključnu ulogu u prevladavanju jezičnih barijera u obrazovanju, zdravstvu i drugim javnim uslugama. Ovaj rad donosi nove uvide u uporabu prevođenja na romski jezik kao načina ostvarivanja socijalne prave i time stvaranja alternativnih prostora (Baker 2013) za ekonomsku i socijalnu uključenost uz istodobno unapređivanje zaštite okoliša. Aktivnosti

prevoditelja za romski jezik sagledavaju se kroz prizmu etičkog angažmana (Boéri 2023.).

Ključne riječi: romski jezik, usmeno prevođenje, okoliš, socijalna uključenost, Sjeverna Makedonija