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**Комиссия по балканскому языкознанию
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**Языки и диалекты
малых этнических групп
на Балканах**

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**Linguistic Research of Small Exogamic Communities:
the Case of Banyash Roumanians in Serbia**

The title of this paper contains a scientific (constructed) term aimed to refer to the Roumanian language speaking Gypsies in Serbia and Montenegro – *Banyash Roumanians*. However, in contemporary Bulgaria the term *Rudari* is common, while in Roumania both terms are present: *Rudari* and *Băeși*. For the same ethnic group in Hungary and Croatia the terms *Beyash* and *Boyash* are now officially used. The ethnonym *Banyash* in Serbia is known only among the group settled in Bačka region, living along the river Danube, near the border with Croatia and Hungary. This term is only sporadically understood, but not used among some other Banyash groups in the Serbian Banat region, e.g. the village of Uljma. Among South Slavs, the names *Karavlas* or *Roumanian Gypsies* were also used for this specific Gypsy group.¹

The rather modest ethnographic literature concerning Banyash from Serbia belongs to the first half of the 20th century (the majority of these papers were later included in the comprehensive study of Vukanović (1983)); more recent ethnographic data about Banyash from Vojvodina region enables just a summarizing overview to the problem [Etnološka građa 1979; Cigane moj 1997]. The linguistic data about Serbian Banyash are lacking, except for the short article of the Roumanian dialectologist Emil Petrovici (1938).

This paper is grounded on the author's personal and later team fieldwork among Serbian Banyash that started in 2002 and is still in progress. It aims at making a short comment on the following Serbian Banyash topics: establishing the geographic area from Serbia they inhabit,² determining some basic linguistic traces, and the question of their own ethnic group endogamy but local community exogamy (intermarriages among the different Banyash settlements).³

The majority of Banyash Roumanians in Serbia today live in mixed communities with different South Slav groups along the rivers: Danube, Sava, Tisa and Morava, but they can also be found in some villages cohabiting with the Roumanian language speaking Vlachs (now recognized as a

¹ The discussion on the suggested scientific term *Banyash* (*Banjas*) s. in [Sikimić 2003; Sikimić 2005].

² The revised list of researched and presupposed Banyash local communities was given in [Sikimić 2003].

³ The question of internal structure of the Gypsy community is considered to be one of the key problems in contemporary romology, more details in [Marushiakova, Popov 2004].

national minority). The estimated figure of Banyash settlements (also obtained during recent fieldwork) in central Serbia is about 140, plus 30 in Banat and 7 in Bačka region (the province of Vojvodina). However, the approximate dimensions of the Banyash population cannot be estimated (it is impossible to determine their exact number, not even with the help of most recent extensive demographic study about Roma in Serbia [Jakšić, Bašić 2005]).

On the basis of the fieldwork research we conducted we can affirm that Banyash in Serbia have originally spoken at least two different Roumanian dialects: dialects of Muntenia and Ardeal. The researched mixed (Banyash and Serbs) settlements on the South of the rivers Sava and Danube use the Muntenian dialect as a basis of their vernaculars.

In the Serbian Banat region and in the North Eastern Serbia, Banyash vernaculars are strongly influenced by the local dialect of the Roumanian language, used by the majority of neighboring Roumanian and by the Vlach population. In the mixed Roumanian and Banyash villages and Vlach and Banyash villages especially the younger generation speaks the more prestigious local non-Banyash Roumanian dialect. At the moment, in the given conditions, it is very difficult to reconstruct the original dialect of their ancestors.

Unlike the Banyash (*Băieși* or *Rudari*) vernaculars spoken on the territory of Roumania, Banyash vernaculars from Serbia (like those from Bosnia, Macedonia and Hungary) are not influenced by the Roumanian standard language. According to some relatively recent linguistic data, insular Banyash communities in Roumania are endogamous, and there are no mixed marriages with the local Roumanian population [Calotă 1995: 130]. The described Banyash enclaves in Oltenia differ among themselves, although they all show Transcarpathian characteristics [Calotă 1995: 137]. In Oltenia, e.g., they are also characterized by one-directional dialectal bilingualism, because of the more prestigious status of local Oltenian vernaculars [Calotă 1995: 131]. We can only remark that there should be a hidden Banyash influence at the idiolect level and/or on the expressive speech of local Roumanians.

Transborder Banyash continuum

The Roman Catholics Banyash group in Bačka region, living along the river Danube, near the border with Croatia and Hungary, speak the Ardeal

dialect.¹ In the same region, the considerably small group of Orthodox Banyash probably used to speak the Muntenian dialect, but in the mixed settlement of Apatin this vernacular is now under the strong influence of Ardeal speaking Banyash majority. The Muntenian dialect is said to be still spoken among Banyash in East Croatia, in several settlements just across the Danube. These Orthodox Muntenian dialect speaking Banyash, now in the state of Croatia, still have very strong personal connections with Banyash on the other side of the Danube. The concept of Banyash transborder continuity in this region will be illustrated by the excerpt from the transcription of the conversation held with the local Roma and Banyash leader Anton Čonka, in the village of Sonta, 29.05.2004.² The usage of unmarked or marked choices is expected in potentially status raising situations, such as the semi structured interview with the Roma leader (while trying to express „political correct“ contents in his native speech) (e.g. [Myers-Scotton 1999]).³ In the given translation the code switching is marked by italics when he uses the Roumanian language.

(And for yourself, you say that you are „Ardilen“?) No, I do not understand that word again, how do you mean what am I, what word? („Ardilen“, or perhaps „Munčan“, „Munćen“? Didn't you hear about this division based on the speech?) We are, we have never had,⁴ we have seen that Roma, the ones speaking the Romani language, call us „Bunjaši“ or „Bejaši“, and we them, that is we Roumanians, we call them *Lacătari*, we call them like that because they speak this „Lakatar“ language that we do not understand, and they call us „Bunjaši“. (You are „Bunjaši“ for them? And what do you say

¹ From a linguistic point of view, the data collected by the Roumanian dialectologist Nicolae Saramandu from a Banyash group in Međimurje, Croatia, are very similar to that of this Ardeal Banyash community [Saramandu 1997].

² Original text: (A za sebe kažete da ste Ardilen?) Ne, opet ne razumem tu reč, kako mislite da sam ja, koja reč? (Ardilen, ili možda Munčan, Munćen? Niste čuli za tu podelu prema jeziku?) Mi smo, nikad nismo imali, mi smo videli da nas Romi, znači koji pričaju romskim jezikom nazivaju Bunjaši ili Bejaši, a mi njih, znači mi Rumuni, njih zovemo *Lacătari*, tako smo mi njih nazvali zato što pričaju taj lakatarski jezik koji mi ne razumemo, a oni nas zovu Bunjaši. (Vi ste Bunjaši za njih? A sami šta kažete za sebe?) *Țăgași, io mi-s Țăgan, sfătuiesc limbă rumunașce. Beajași ișceși niș aia, a dă noi asta e novo, io na primer, am kontakt cu ortășii mei dăn Madarska, dă pă Ungaria, și ei ziseș noi ișceși beaș, da vorbeșceră cum și io, acumă dă mișe e nov și io-ș vrea noi toți să ni, să ni sastavim, să fim, znači, un lume, un limbă și tot să vorbim noi.* E sad za mene to je nešto novo, *astă dă mișe nov, să io să sfătuiesc cu alți.* Gledajte, uglavnom preko u Hrvatskoj, Beli Manastir, oni pričaju to, *dă manastir, dă biserică.* (To što sam ja pitala?) Da. Oni tamo pričaju tako, što vi kažete. Al to je sve ovde preko granice, znači petnes kilometara preko Dunava, jel nama je Dunav tri kilometra vazdušne linije. A i njima je isto pet kilometra vazdušne linije, znači da smo mi na petnes-dvaes kilometra tu razlike, jel taj pogranični deo, a pričamo sasvim drukčije.

³ Some aspects of linguistic ideology in a few Gypsy communities from Hungary were given in [Kovalcsik 1999].

⁴ The distinction between Ardeal and Munten Banyash is known in the town of Apatin, some 20 km on the North of the village of Sonta.

about yourselves?) *Gypsies, I am Gypsy¹, I am speaking the Roumanian language. Beyash are not that, and for us this is something new, I for example, I do have contacts with my colleagues from Hungary, from Hungary, and they say we are Beyash, but they do speak like me, now for me this is new and I would like all of us to, to unite, to be, that is, one people, one language and all to speak. Now for me this is something new, this is new for me, to talk with the others. You see, mostly across, in Croatia, Beli Manastir, they speak this, *dă manastir, dă biserică*. (This what I have asked?) Yes. There they speak this way, as you have said. But all this is across the frontier, which means fifteen kilometers across the Danube, because we have the Danube at three kilometers of aerial distance away. And for them is the same, five kilometers of aerial distance, that means that we are here at fifteen-twenty kilometers away, this border line, but we speak completely differently.*

The local Roma and Banyash leader, Anton Čonka, uses the politically correct term *Romi* (Roma), but talking about himself in native Roumanian he uses the ordinary term *Cigan* (Gypsy).² The local opposition in the village of Sonta appears to be *Lakatari* (Roma Gypsies) vs. *Bunjaši, Bejaši* (Romanian Gypsies). It is obvious that the term *Bejaš* (Roum. *beaș*) belongs to the domain of recent, politically correct ethnonyms because it was borrowed from his colleagues, other Roma leaders (S-Cr. *ortaci*) from Hungary. Notice the slight phonetic difference between the mentioned terms *Bunjaši* and *Bejaši* attributed to the same ethnic group by the local Roma („Lakatari“).

The education in the Roumanian language is available only for the Banyash living in Roumanian villages in Banat. During the last few years there have been several attempts on behalf of local non-governmental organizations in East Bačka region to introduce facultative classes of Roumanian. At the moment (2004 field research data) only two such projects are still going on: facultative classes of Roumanian language in the village of Vajska, and kindergarten in the local Ardeal dialect in Bački Monoštor, attended by altogether 20 pupils. The same Ardeal dialect can be heard, from time to time, on the nearest local radio station from Sombor within the one hour program for Roma on Sundays. For the moment, Banyash in other non-Roumanian settlements have two choices: either the introduction of the standard Roumanian language or the local dialect in some kind of cultural

¹ Answering the census questions in this region, the Banyash declared themselves as Roumanians. The 2002 census data attest 138 Roma and 211 Roumanians living in Sonta (no one declared as „Vlach“), from the total of 4992 inhabitants. The autochthonous Roumanians do not live in the Bačka region.

² This fact is generally widespread, the members of all Serbian Banyash groups consider themselves Roumanians, but, when speaking the Romanian language, they all use the term *Tigan* (Gypsy) as self-designation.

or educational program (however, for the moment no measures have been taken in this respect). This second solution (i.e. raising the local Banyash dialect to the level of a standard Banyash language) was the policy officially accepted by the Hungarian and Croatian governments.¹

Banyash group endogamy and exogamic communities

Vranjevo is the suburb of the small town of Novi Bečej in the Eastern Banat region, situated on the banks of the river Tisa. The Orthodox Banyash in Vranjevo even marry the Catholic and Ardeal dialect speaking women from the distant town Apatin. There are also a lot of intermarriages with the local Serbian speaking Roma. This particular case is typical for the majority of Serbian Banyash.²

The anthropogeographical fieldwork held between the two World Wars offers us very reliable data about the Banyash settlement of Mala Trešnjeвица in central Serbia, on the valley of the river Morava³. Mention is made of the exclusively „Gypsy village“ that used to be „more in the mountain“ where people (the majority of them tub-makers) were living in sod-houses, until their moving to Mala Trešnjeвица around the year 1850. During the researched period the village had 60 houses and 175 inhabitants. The first big families came to the former village of Mala Tršenjevica at the beginning of the XIX century from the Eastern regions of Crna Reka and Timočka Krajina; some other family groups came from the same regions later in several waves [Мијатовић 1948: 93]. The contemporary village of Mala Trešnjeвица practically does not exist: the majority of its population has moved to the lower positioned Serbian village of Trešnjeвица.⁴ Today the local exogamy is the rule in Trešnjeвица: all the female participants in the fieldwork we conducted were from other Banyash settlements („the surroundings of Majdanpek“, that is, probably, the Banyash village of Brodice, the village of Orašje in the Resava valley and the village of Strižilo). The Banyash group awareness is illustrated by the transcription excerpt of the semi structured interview held 26.08.2002 in the village of Trešnjeвица with Milenko

¹ In Hungary there are available some Banyash dialect dictionaries, compiled with the use of the Hungarian language orthography [Varga 1996; Orsós 2003].

² Basic anthropological linguistic information about the Banyash community of Vranjevo is given in [Сикимић 2004; Sikimić, forthcoming a].

³ There are several scientific papers about the contemporary Banyash village of Trešnjeвица, close to the town of Jagodina in the Morava valley, included in the collection of papers *Banjaši*, in print at the Institute of Balkan Studies, Belgrade [Hedešan 2005; Милорадовић 2005; Илић 2005].

⁴ According to 2002 census data, Trešnjeвица has 1137 inhabitants: 991 Serbs, 43 Roma and 90 Roumanians. This only formally contradicts the informer's estimation (see the transcription below) of about 200 Roumanian houses in nowadays Trešnjeвица, the usual attitude being the official declaration of the Serbian nationality, while Roumanian is reserved for internal communication.

Vasić (1906-2002), in Serbian language.¹ The italic letters mark the cited Banyash settlements, some of them in the Banyash, not Serbian pronunciation (*Plažane* is in fact the old Banyash settlement, which was moved to nowadays *Orašje*, *Išalnica* stands for *Jošanica*, *Lukova* for *Lukovo*, *Vitanci* for *Vitanovac*, and *Naumpara* for *Naupara*):

These [yellow ribbons during the WW2] were worn by Gypsies, we were marked, suspected as Gypsies, but we are not Gypsies, no. (I understand.) *Trešnjevica*, *Suvaja*, *Lukova*, *Naumpare*, *Išalnica*, there are a lot of villages that are not, *Strižilo*, further there is *Babajić*. (What else, Roumanian villages?) Well, there are villages, you have *Plažane*, and then you have *Naumpare*, *Vitanci*, *Sezemča*, *Išalnica*, and than you have, well, I can't remember, there at *Čestobrodica*. (Oh, *Lukovo*?) Yes. *Čestobrodica*. I have said *Strižilo*, and *Babajić*, and *Ranilović*, and there are at *Mala Krsna*, and further, I can't say, I don't know further, there is *Crvinci*, there is, not *Mladenovac*, no. (*Arandelovac*?) *Arandelovac* is not. *Bukovik!* [...] (*Bukovik* is close to *Arandelovac*, OK, OK, do you know some more?) Well, this is a big village, not small, small, about fifty houses, yes. (And how many at *Plažana*?) In *Plažana* there are, really, about one hundred houses. (And in *Naumpara*?) Oh, *Naumpara* is bigger. (How many Roumanian houses?) More than one hundred and fifty. (And how many Roumanian houses are there in *Trešnjevica*?) [...] Well, it can be about a few less than two hundred. [...] And, *Strižilo* is more than five hundred. [...] In *Suvaja* there are more than three hundred, they are a settlement, a lot of people from *Suvaja* live now in *Varvarin*. In *Varvarin* it could be about fifty houses, moved. [...] *Sezemča* is not, they moved a lot, could be now three hundred houses, they moved, went to other [...] (And how many in *Išalnica*?) This can also be about one hundred houses. (*Ranilović* how many?) Oh, this I can't tell you exactly, but they are, it is not a big village, it is, can be again about one hundred houses or so.

¹ Original text: To [žute trake za vreme Drugog svetskog rata] nosili Cigani, a mi smo bili označeni, posumnjani kao Cigani, ali nismo Cigani, ne. (Razumem.) *Trešnjevica*, *Suvaja*, *Lukova*, *Naumpare*, *Išalnica*, tamo ima mnogo sela koje nisu, *Strižilo*, tamo posle ima *Babajić*. (Koje još ima, rumunska sela?) Pa ima sela, imaš *Plažane*, pa ondak imaš *Naumpare*, *Vitanci*, *Sezemča*, *Išalnica*, pa ondak imaš, ovaj, bre, ne mogu se setim, tamo kod *Čestobrodicu*. (A, *Lukovo*?) Da. *Čestobrodica*. Reko sam *Strižilo*, pa *Babajić*, pa *Ranilović*, pa ima u *Malu Krsnu*, i tamo dalje, da bi ti kazao to ne znam dalje, a ima *Crvinci*, ima, nije *Mladenovac*, nije. (*Arandelovac*?) *Arandelovac* nije. *Bukovik!* [...] (*Bukovik* kod *Arandelovca*, dobro, dobro, jel znate još neke?) Pa to je veliko selo, nije veliko selo, malo, oko pedeset kuća, da. (A koliko ima u *Plažanu*?) U *Plažanu* ima, bogami, oko stotinu kuća. (A u *Naumpara*?) A *Naumpara* je veća. (Koliko ima rumunskih kuća?) Preko sto pedeset. (A koliko ima ovde u *Trešnjevici* rumunskih kuća?) [...] Pa sad možda ima negde, možda malo fali od dvesta kuća. [...] A, *Strižilo* je preko petsto kuća. [...] U *Suvaju* ima više od trista, oni su naselje, iz *Suvaja* mnogi u *Varvarinu* sad sede. U *Varvarin* možda ima oko pedeset kuća, useljeni. [...] *Sezemča* nije, ona se iselila dosta, možda ima još trista kuća, iselila se, otišla po druga [...] (A koliko ih je u *Išalnici*?) I to možda ima oko stotinu kuće. (*Ranilović* koliko ih ima?) Ej, to ne mogu da ti tačno pričam, ali ima, oni nije veliko selo, to je, možda ima, jopet oko stotinu kuća, tako.

The interlocutor's exact geographical orientation and reliable knowledge concerning the number of Banyash „houses“ in each mentioned settlement (which was later proven right by the fieldwork), not the estimated number of inhabitants, are obvious. This traditional concept used to approximate the size of a settlement was still in the scientific usage in Serbia in the middle of the XXth century, as it is shown in the anthropogeographical research concerning the former village of Mala Trešnjevica.

The village of Brodice is an exclusively Banyash settlement, now a village of migrant workers in Austria, surrounded by the Roumanian speaking Vlachs.¹ The inhabitants of Brodice started to practice group exogamy very recently, mainly marrying Banyash or even Roumanian women from Roumania.

There are also some special cases of endogamy: due to the very strong social difference among the settled Banyash and the nomadic bear-trainers (also speaking Roumanian), there are no intermarriage connections among these two groups, and consequently no dialect interferences – this situation can also be observed in the village of Bukovik (near Arandelovac) where these two Roumanian speaking Gypsy groups used to live together.² The Bukovik Ursari group used to have marriage connections exclusively with the Ursari from the town of Belgrade.³

Completely isolated is the case of the unique endogamous Banyash settlement of Berilje (near Prokuplje), which can suggest that their Roumanian dialect remained intact. Other Central Serbian Banyash have some knowledge about the Berilje community, but no mixed marriages were attested. Bilingualism in the village of Berilje is almost two directional: there are a lot of Serbs able to hold a simple conversation in the local Roumanian dialect.⁴ The population of the village of Berilje is rather new; they were settled here after the 1880.⁵ Such isolated Banyash enclaves exist (or existed until recently) also in some other Balkan regions, e.g., in the North

¹ As a rule, the statistical facts differ from the fieldwork data. According to official 2002 census the village of Brodica has 468 inhabitants: 210 Serbs, 213 Vlachs, 12 Roumanians and 5 Roma.

² The mixed Serbian and Banyash village of Bukovik has 2743 inhabitants: 2572 Serbs, 12 Roma and 64 Roumanians (2002 census data).

³ About the connections of the former Belgrade bear trainers and the village of Bukovik see [Ćirković 2005].

⁴ Some people from the close village of Naumpara knew now about the existence of the Banyash community from Berilje. This ethnic integration into the Serbian majority is evident, according to 2002 census data: from 724 inhabitants only 1 person declared Roma nationality and 1 person Roumanian.

⁵ It is rather simple to establish the year of Banyash settling in Berilje: this must be about the year 1880 due to the fact that they appear in the 1884 census. Before 1878 in the village of Berilje there has lived an Albanian Muslim population. Historiographers give a direct confirmation of this fact: „From Roumania 103 inhabitants were settled, mainly of Gypsy origin (of Vlach language, in villages)“ [Николић-Стојанчевић 1985: 117].

of Montenegro and in North Eastern Macedonia [Трифуноски 1974; Sikimić 2005].

Major problems facing the Banyash anthropological linguistics

Establishing the complete list of Banyash settlements is the basic framework for the future research. Banyash are invisible in the official censuses due to the evident ethnic mimicry; they can partially be traced only on the basis of the data concerning their mother tongue.

The next step is to establish the scientifically relevant network of nodes representative for the researched communities. The current network of researched Banyash settlements is based on the data obtained with the use of the perceptual dialectology methods (in endogamous settlements it is very difficult to obtain even such subjective „perceptual“ data). The compendious analysis of data from the fieldwork given in [Sikimić 2005] introduces the concept of ‘mental continuity’ aimed to define the Banyash group endogamy and their distant group awareness, all influencing the small settlements’ exogamy.

Due to these facts, the classical dialectological research among Banyash today is impossible. In the majority of their settlements, Banyash live in small, but exogamic communities and find their spouses sometimes in very distant Banyash settlements. This makes the dialectological picture of each settlement rather complicated and requires the research of the community’s social network. Having in mind, on the one hand, the reduced life expectancy and, on the other, the very frequent promiscuity (e.g., in the village of Mehovine and among all Bačka region Banyash) and high number of personal marriages (up to nine), the research on the level of idiolect is to be preferred. The character of the settlement is also important, varying from a few isolated families in big towns up to compact Banyash villages.

In a diachronically oriented research, the integrative approach to all the autochthonous Banyash communities in the region of the Balkans and Central Europe is necessary. From the synchronic point of view, the factor of establishing recent 20th century frontiers must be taken into consideration. Nowadays Banyash geographic areas reflect the pre-Yugoslav historical conditions, the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and even the period of the Ottoman Empire.

The comparison and experience in working with other Balkan nomadic peoples, first of all with Aromanians, and the phenomena of migration and nomadism, can be helpful for the study of the Banyash. The common traces for such a community are insularity and geographic mobility. The Banyash

migration dynamics is now accelerated and we can even use the metaphor of the „compression of time“ to describe the migration process. The question is which diachronic level should be reconstructed, or is possible to be reconstructed? The importance of this question which was raised based on the Banyash anthropological facts is re-emphasized due to the most recent migrations of the non-Roma population in the Balkans during the 90's. To what extent is it scientifically justified to reconstruct the facts from the middle of the 20th century?

The broadening of interdisciplinary contacts as a field for the future study of linguistic mechanisms of Balkan contact phenomena was recently suggested by Friedman (2000). Romani studies have already become an integral part of Balkan linguistics: we must only stress the importance of Banyash multilingualism and anthropological linguistic – the reconstruction of their traditional culture (or – ethnolinguistic problems as defined in the Small Dialectal Atlas of the Balkan Languages). Tracing the traditional Roumanian culture in the Balkans must take into consideration not only all the Roumanian language speakers but also the Vlach Romani (Gypsy) vernacular speakers whose ancestors used to live, in some period of time, close to the Roumanian population.¹

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¹ See the application of this concept in [Сикимић, forthcoming b].

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