


## LANGUAGE ATTITUDES THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS: VULNERABLE LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTIC VARIETIES IN SERBIA<sup>a</sup>

Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković<sup>1\*</sup>, Dušan Vlajić<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, Belgrade, Serbia

<sup>2</sup>University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Serbia

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ORCID iDs: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8389-9976>  
Dušan Vlajić  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0084-365X>

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the attitudes of members of vulnerable linguistic communities in Serbia towards their own languages. Based on the results of a quantitative survey carried out in 2023, the authors assess the attitudes of speakers of vulnerable languages towards the maintenance and revitalisation of their languages, including transmission to the younger generations and their introduction in the school system, and discuss their feelings regarding speaking the language with the members of the community and outside the community. Finally, they examine the correlation between the aforementioned variables and a series of demographic factors to determine whether there are any statistically significant relations between them. The research shows that the majority of speakers of vulnerable languages in Serbia show positive attitudes towards their language, regardless of gender in most of the cases. On the other hand, the variable 'language of the community' is correlated with all other variables, while the variables 'age' and 'education level' correlate with some of the aforementioned attitudes and emotions. This is partially in line with what has been recently termed an *attitude shift* by sociolinguists, a change in ideology implying positive attitudes towards one's own endangered language, a phenomenon observed in several endangered language contexts worldwide.

**Key words:** language attitudes, language endangerment, intersectionality, minority languages, Serbia.

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\* Corresponding author: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Knez Mihailova 35/IV, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia  
[annemariesorescu@gmail.com](mailto:annemariesorescu@gmail.com)

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## ЈЕЗИЧКИ СТАВОВИ ИЗ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ ИНТЕРСЕКЦИОНАЛНОСТИ: РАЊИВИ ЈЕЗИЦИ И ЈЕЗИЧКИ ВАРИЈЕТЕТИ У СРБИЈИ

### Апстракт

Рад истражује ставове говорника рањивих језика у Србији према сопственим језицима. На основу резултата квантитативног истраживања спроведеног 2023. године, аутори процењују ставове говорника рањивих језика и језичких варијете-та у вези са одржавањем и ревитализацијом својих језика, као и са преношењем на млађе генерације и њихово увођење у школски систем, и дискутују о осећањима и перцепцији сопствених језика од стране говорника. Даље, аутори испитују повезаност поменутих варијабли са низом демографских фактора, како би установили да ли постоји статистички значајна корелација између њих. Истраживање показује да већина говорника рањивих језика у Србији има позитивне ставове према сопственим језику, без обзира на пол и то у већини случајева. Са друге стране, језик којим говорници причају показује повезаност са свим осталим варијаблама, док варијабле 'године' и 'ниво образовања' корелирају са неким од горе-поменутих ставова и осећања. Овај резултат је делимично у складу са оним што су социолингвисти недавно назвали *attitude shift* (промена става), што означава промену идеологије која имплицира позитивне ставове према сопственом угро-женом језику, феноменом који се данас среће у више угрожених језичких контекста широм света.

**Кључне речи:** језички ставови, угрожени језици, интерсекционалност, мањински језици, Србија.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, it has been repeatedly stressed that many of the approximately six thousand languages that are spoken around the globe are under threat. As language diversity is essential to human heritage and even existence, efforts were made to document endangered languages, to create new policy initiatives and support language communities in their efforts to preserve their languages or to understand their roles. Alongside these efforts, linguists have sought to identify factors contributing to language endangerment in order to reverse it, and generally agree that language endangerment may be the result of: external factors, such as military, economic, religious, cultural or economic subjugation, or of internal factors, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language.<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays the key factor in language endangerment are most probably the attitudes of the speech community concerning their language, as a

<sup>1</sup> As stated in the document *Language Vitality and Endangerment*, compiled by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages and submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages in Paris, 10–12 March 2003, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf>. Last accessed: September 10, 2024.

series of linguists have stressed (Bradley, 2002; Sallabank, 2013). Although it might seem counterintuitive from the perspective of majority language speakers, speakers of minority languages are not always appreciative of their own language. Negative attitudes are often internalised by speakers, and the use of a minority language comes to be stigmatised, so that speakers feel ashamed of it (Sallabank, 2013). Therefore, they will be even more appreciative of the majority language(s) and avoid using their own language, which increases the risk of the language becoming endangered (Garrett, 2010; Dragojevic, Fasoli, Cramer & Rakić, 2021). Moreover, negative attitudes towards one's language make speakers less likely to transmit it to their children, which leads to a self-perpetuating downward spiral and might seal the future of the language (Calvet, 1998; Sallabank, 2013).

Although a negative attitude towards one's language usually triggers language shift and speakers becoming less and less proficient in it, putting the survival of their language in danger, it has been shown that the opposite does not always hold true. Namely, nowadays speakers of already vulnerable or highly endangered languages and sometimes their offspring, who do not speak the language any longer, do not have negative attitudes towards the language. On the contrary, more often than not they show positive and highly appreciative attitudes. Therefore, a change in ideology, implying positive attitudes towards one's own endangered language, has been identified among the generation whose parents shifted language for economic reasons (Crystal, 2000, p.106). The same phenomenon was observed in other endangered language contexts on a society-wide basis, and termed *attitude shift* to echo *language shift*, although the direction of attitude shift, from negative to positive, tends to support a reversal of language shift (Sallabank, 2010, p.78).

The present paper is based on the results of a quantitative survey carried out in 2023 in vulnerable language communities in Serbia. Using a series of quantitative methods, the aim of our study is threefold. First, we aim to assess the attitudes of speakers of vulnerable languages towards the maintenance and revitalisation of their languages, including transmission to the younger generation and introducing them into the school system. Second, we aim to assess their feelings regarding speaking the language with the members of their community, and outside the community. Third, we want to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation of the aforementioned attitudes and feelings with specific demographic factors and with specific languages.

In order to achieve the third objective of the paper, we use intersectionality as an analytic lens (Salem, 2018). Although it has received much criticism and has been deemed too inflexible (Lugones, 2014; Nagel, 2019) in the time following the term's initial introduction by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989), we use the intersectional lens to understand how different factors which form the identity of the members of the vulnerable lan-

guage speaking communities in Serbia result in unique combinations of discrimination or privilege. We therefore, following Tripp, consider the intersectional analytic lens a perceptual aid, whose use “is not a neutral act, nor does it guarantee clear perception, but it does allow us to begin the process of identifying that which is imperceptible without it” (Tripp, 2023, p. 515).

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

Our study draws on the results of research carried out within the framework of the project *Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia* (VLingS) between 2022 and 2024.<sup>2</sup> Starting from the data offered by Serbian population censuses, the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, *Ethnologue* and the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages*, but also by unofficial estimates regarding the number of speakers of different varieties, and the direct experience and expertise of the project members, the project was aimed at providing a more accurate assessment of the degree of vulnerability of languages and linguistic varieties in Serbia. The project encompassed the following languages and language varieties: Aromanian, Banat Bulgarian, Vojvodina Rusyn (Ruthenian), Judezmo (Ladino), Romani (Vlax and Balkan varieties), Megleno-Romanian, Vlach and Bayash Romanian. Out of these, only Rusyn and Romani are officially recognised as minority languages in Serbia according to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Bulgarian, on the other hand, is recognised, but Banat Bulgarian is not.

The pilot fieldwork research within the VLingS project was conducted in 2022, and the main fieldwork research was conducted in 2023, in Serbia, in the linguistic communities included in the project.<sup>3</sup> For the quantitative survey part of the research, we used a sociolinguistic questionnaire, which was coupled with interviews in the target languages, aimed both at language documentation and gathering qualitative information. The questionnaire was not an adaptation of any existing sociolinguistic questionnaire, but created by the members of the project. The questionnaire had a pilot version, *VLingS Questionnaire 0.0*, which was administered during fieldwork in 2022 in 26 settlements in Serbia, with a total of 158 respondents participating in the pilot study (see Mirić, Sokolovska & Sorescu-Marinković, 2024, for details).

<sup>2</sup> More about the project in: Mirić, Sorescu-Marinković & Sokolovska (2024), and on the website of the project <https://vlings.rs/>. Last accessed: September 10, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The results of the pilot research are presented in several studies: Ćirković, 2023; Sorescu-Marinković, 2023; Mirić, Sokolovska & Sorescu-Marinković, 2024. Megleno-Romanian was part of the pilot research, with only one respondent, but was not encompassed by the main research, as we could not identify any more members of the community and therefore consider Megleno-Romanian extinct in Serbia.

On the basis of *VLingS Questionnaire 0.0*, the main survey tool, *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*, was developed, which consists of 16 sections that contain a total of 190 questions and sub-questions that elicited diverse information based on the interviewees' personal experience with the languages and linguistic varieties encompassed by the project. The sections of the questionnaire were as follows: I. General data about linguonyms and language usage, II. Data about language acquisition and intergenerational language transmission, III. Domains of language usage, IV. Literacy, V. Education, VI. Institutional support and linguistic landscape, VII. Publications in the given language, VIII. Media, IX. Religious service, X. Cultural manifestations, XI. Language level self-assessment, XII. Respondents' feelings towards own language, XIII. Ethnic and cultural identity, XIV. Language maintenance and revitalization, XV. Demographic information about the respondent, and XVI. Final remarks (see Mirić et al, 2025).

The questionnaire was administered orally, in face-to-face surveys, in Serbian, so as to allow for the uniformity of the methodology in field-work research. This was possible given that all interviewees who participated in the research spoke Serbian as they were either bilingual in their minority language and Serbian, or multilingual. The statistical analysis of the data was conducted using IBM SPSS 23 statistical software. Following the initial data entry, the database was checked multiple times for errors, which were subsequently corrected. The analyses we present further were done on this final version of the database.

The total number of interviewees who completed the main survey and answered the questions of the *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0* was 686. The data was collected in 56 places in Serbia, both urban and rural. Interviewees of both sexes participated in the research (53.6% women vs. 46.4% men). As for the education of the interviewees, the following distribution was obtained: no education (5.5%), unfinished elementary school (12.4%), finished elementary school (23.8%), vocational school (13.3%), high school degree (19.9%), college degree (5.8%), university degree (15%), postgraduate/PhD studies (3.5%), other (0.7%). As the study did not include persons who were not of age, the youngest interviewee was 18, while the oldest was 88. The average age of participants was 47.79 years ( $SD = 16.43$ ).

The number of speakers of the target languages and linguistic varieties in the overall sample of the VLingS project is presented in Table 1. Not all varieties are equally represented (Table 1), given that the sample was created so as to conform to the share of speakers of the target languages according to the data available from the 2011 census, scientific literature and researchers' expertise on the size of the community, when the census offered no data. The varieties with the biggest number of respondents were Romani – 290, and Vlach – 160. According to the 2011 census, the number

of Roma in Serbia was 147,604, while that of Vlachs was 35,330.<sup>4</sup> The other language varieties were represented with the following number of respondents in the sample: Bayash Romanian – 85 (not present in the census), Vojvodina Rusyn – 78 (the 2011 Census gives a total number of 14,246), Aromanian – 30 (2011 Census: 243), Banat Bulgarian – 29 (not registered in the census as a separate minority) and Ladino – 14 interviewees (not present in the census).

*Table 1. The distribution of languages and language varieties in the overall sample of the V LingS project*

Language	Aromanian	Bayash Romanian	Vlach	Romani	Vojvodina Rusyn	Banat Bulgarian	Ladino
Freq	30	85	160	290	78	29	14
%	4.4	12.4	23.3	42.3	11.4	4.2	2

We framed the present paper from an intersectional perspective and analysed the answers to several questions from the questionnaire using the intersectional lens. By applying intersectional analysis, we wanted to show what points of intersection make the respondent's age, gender and education level with the specific vulnerable language they speak. In what follows, we focus on three questions from section *XIV. Language maintenance and revitalization*, and on two questions from section *XII. Respondents' feelings towards own language*. The questions from section XIV, which tackle the respondents' attitudes towards the revitalisation of their language, its transmission to the younger generations and its use in the school curriculum, are:

*XIV\_4. Is it important to you to preserve/revitalize (or learn) your language?*

*XIV\_6. Is it important to you that your language is passed on to younger generations?*

*XIV\_7. Is it important to you that your language is introduced or maintained in schools in Serbia?*

The questions from section XII, which are meant to assess the feelings of the respondents towards their own language, are:

*XII\_1. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of other speakers of your language?*

*XII\_2. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?*

<sup>4</sup> It has been proven that the number of Vlachs offered by the population censuses is not relevant, as they have a double, contextual identity and usually identify as Serbs whose mother tongue is Vlach (see Raduški, 2006; Knežević 2019; Huțanu & Sorescu-Marinković, 2023). Therefore, we established our sample of Vlach speakers according to estimates of their number, not to the census results.

We have correlated the answers to these questions with three demographic factors – age of respondents, gender and education level – and to the specific target language, in order to see and better understand whether and in which way they are related to the preservation and possible revitalisation of vulnerable languages. For the purpose of examining the relationships of answers to the aforementioned questions and ‘language of community’, ‘gender’ and ‘education level’ Chi-square test for independence was applied, while relationship with age of participants was examined by one-way ANOVA.

### RESULTS

First, we will discuss the distribution of answers to the five analysed questions in the sample, starting with the three questions in section *XIV. Language maintenance and revitalization*, which aim at assessing the respondents’ attitudes towards the maintenance of their language, transmission to the younger generations and introducing it in school.

In Table 2, we see that 614 respondents (90.6%) answered “YES” to the question *Is it important to you to preserve/revitalize (or learn) your language?* Only nine respondents (1.3%) provided a negative answer, while 55 (8.1%) said they were indifferent.

Table 2. The distribution of answers to the question *XIV\_4* in the overall sample of *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*

XIV 4. Is it important to you to preserve/revitalize (or learn) your language?			
	YES	NO	It doesn't matter to me.
Freq	614	9	55
%	90.6	1.3	8.1

Regarding the question *Is it important to you that your language is passed on to younger generations?*, the distribution of answers is similar to the previous one (Table 3). The majority of respondents (91.6%) consider it important, only a small percent provided a negative answer (1.5%), while 47 respondents said it did not matter to them (6.9%).

Table 3. The distribution of answers to the question *XIV\_6* in the overall sample of *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*

XIV 6. Is it important to you that your language is passed on to younger generations?			
	YES	NO	It doesn't matter to me.
Freq	622	10	47
%	91.6	1.5	6.9

The third analysed question in this category, *Is it important to you that your language is introduced or maintained in schools in Serbia?*, shows, nevertheless, a slightly different distribution of responses (Table 4). While the majority of respondents offered positive answers (79.1%), there are definitely more responses in the categories “NO” (9.9%) and “It doesn’t matter to me” (11%).

*Table 4. The distribution of answers to the question XIV\_7 in the overall sample of V LingS Questionnaire 1.0*

XIV_7. Is it important to you that your language is introduced or maintained in schools in Serbia?			
	YES	NO	It doesn't matter to me.
Freq	533	67	74
%	79.1	9.9	11

The response distribution to the questions in section XIV supports the ideological shift marked by a predominantly positive attitude among speakers toward their endangered language. We will return to possible explanations for the higher percentage of negative responses to question XIV\_7, compared to XIV\_4 and XIV\_6, when presenting the analysis of its relationship with community affiliation (see Table 7). For now, it is worth noting that the slightly higher number of negative responses to XIV\_7 likely reflects variation in the number of active speakers among different languages, differences in the perceived importance of language for ethnic identity, and the (non-)existence of a written standard.

Further, the interviewees could choose one of the following six answers, covering a range of pleasant, neutral and unpleasant feelings, to reply to the two analysed questions from section XII. *Respondents' feelings towards own language*: “I am proud,” “I feel comfortable,” “I feel as usual,” “I feel uncomfortable,” “I am ashamed” and “I don’t know, I don’t think about it.”

The answers to the first question from this section, *How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of other speakers of your language?*, present the following distribution: 49.3% of the respondents have pleasant feelings (they feel proud or comfortable), 43.3% feel as usual, 4.9% do not think about it and 2.5% have unpleasant feelings (they feel uncomfortable or ashamed) (Table 5).

**Table 5.** *The distribution of answers to the question XII\_1 in the overall sample of V LingS Questionnaire 1.0*

XII_1. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of other speakers of your language?						
	Proud	Comfortable	As usual	Uncomfortable	Ashamed	I don't know
Freq	148	173	282	7	9	32
%	22.7%	26.6%	43.3%	1.1%	1.4%	4.9%



As for the answers to the second question, *How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?*, the results show a different picture (Table 6). This time, only 27% of the respondents feel proud or comfortable, while the majority, 57%, show neutral feelings (they feel as usual or do not think about it), with 15.9% showing unpleasant feelings (feeling uncomfortable or ashamed).

Table 6. The distribution of answers to the question XII\_2 in the overall sample of *VLingS Questionnaire 1.0*

XII_2. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?						
	Proud	Comfortable	As usual	Uncomfortable	Ashamed	I don't know
Freq	109	66	282	97	6	87
%	16.8%	10.2%	43.6%	15%	0.9%	13.4%

The larger number of respondents who feel uncomfortable speaking their language in the presence of Serbian speakers, compared to those who feel the same when speaking it in front of other speakers of the same language, may indicate internalised negative attitudes and the stigmatisation of minority language use among a portion of the respondents.

### *The Language of the Community*

The Chi-square test for independence showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between belonging to a specific language community and all the analysed answers to the three questions from section XIV. However, members of all vulnerable language communities in Serbia included in the survey consider it important to maintain, revitalise or learn the language of their community, to transmit their language to younger generations and to introduce or maintain their language in the school system.

Regarding the introduction of the language in school, Table 7 shows that generally it is important to everybody. The effect size (Cramer's  $V = .328$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicates that for the table of these dimensions the association of the two variables is medium, but close to the criteria for large (.35) (Palant, 2009). However, one should be careful in interpreting the results because 28.6% of cells have expected frequencies less than 5, which violates the assumption of the lowest expected cell frequency (that at least 80% of cells have expected frequencies of 5 or more) (ibid).

Nevertheless, a closer look at Table 7 shows important differences between communities. Out of the 29 respondents from the Aromanian community who answered this question, 12 (41.4%) do not consider it important that their language is introduced in the school system in Serbia. Out of the 14 respondents belonging to the Sephardic Jew community, 11 (78.6%) do not think it is important that Ladino is introduced in schools. This can be explained by the fact that these two communities are the small-

est in our study, with a very small number of active speakers, therefore the members are aware that there would probably be no pupils to attend the language courses. Additionally, it is possible that members of these communities do not view their language as a marker of ethnic identity and, therefore, do not consider it relevant for education.

On the other hand, the Vojvodina Rusyn respondents show the highest percentage of positive attitude towards the introduction/maintenance of their language in the school system: 98.7% (77 out of 78 respondents answered “YES” to the question). As the Vojvodina Rusyn are an officially recognised national minority in Serbia and their language has a written standard and has been taught in schools since the end of World War II (Ramač, 2018), this is most probably connected to the already existing patterns and high language prestige, both in the in-group and the out-group.

In between are the Vlachs (7% are against the introduction of their language in schools), Roma (8%) and Banat Bulgarian (24.1%). The first two language varieties are atomised into dialects, and all three have a debated standard and are hardly present in the school system – in only a few places in Serbia, in the form of an optional subject “Mother tongue with elements of national culture.” As at least the two varieties have a relatively large number of speakers, a long tradition of orality and a relatively good intergenerational transmission, part of the members of the community find it counterproductive to widen the domain of use of their language. Nevertheless, the positive attitudes prevail.

*Table 7. The distribution of answers to the question XIV\_7 according to the language of the given linguistic community*

XIV_7. Is it important to you that your language is introduced or maintained in schools in Serbia?			
The language of the community ↓	YES (%)	NO (%)	It doesn't matter to me. (%)
Romani	231 (80.5%)	23 (8%)	33 (11.5%)
Vlach	121 (76.6%)	11 (7%)	26 (16.5%)
Vojvodina Rusyn	77 (98.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)
Bayash Romanian	66 (83.5%)	3 (3.8%)	10 (12.7%)
Banat Bulgarian	22 (75.9%)	7 (24.1%)	0 (0%)
Aromanian	13 (44.8%)	12 (41.4%)	4 (13.8%)
Ladino	3 (21.4%)	11 (78.6%)	0 (0%)

The Chi-square test for independence showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between belonging to a specific language community and all the analysed answers to the two questions from section XII. Therefore, members of all vulnerable language communities included in our survey generally have pleasant feelings or feel as usual when speaking their language in the presence of other speakers of their language. Specifically, the results show that 148 respondents (22.7%) feel proud, 173 (26.6%) report feeling comfortable, and 282 (43.3%) state that they feel as usual. Seven respondents (1.1%) feel uncomfortable, while 9 (1.4%) report feeling ashamed. A total of 32 respondents (4.9%) say they do not reflect on their emotional experience. Likewise, they generally have pleasant feelings or feel as usual when speaking their language in the presence of Serbian speakers, but in this latter case it is evident that the bigger the number of respondents from a specific language community is, the bigger the percentage of those who feel uncomfortable when speaking the language (Table 8).

*Table 8. The distribution of answers to the question XII\_2 according to the language of the given linguistic community*

XII_2. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?						
The language of the community ↓	Proud (%)	Comfortable (%)	As usual (%)	Uncomfortable (%)	Ashamed (%)	I don't know (%)
Vlach	37 (23.7%)	9 (5.8%)	59 (37.8%)	37 (23.7%)	0 (0%)	14 (9%)
Romani	27 (9.7%)	26 (9.4%)	136 (48.9%)	37 (13.3%)	6 (2.2%)	46 (16.5%)
Bayash	26 (31%)	14 (16.7%)	34 (40.5%)	6 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	4 (4.8%)
Romanian	10 (13%)	4 (5.2%)	41 (53.2%)	10 (13%)	0 (0%)	12 (15.6%)
Vojvodina	7 (38.9%)	4 (22.2%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)
Rusyn	2 (7.7%)	5 (19.2%)	7 (26.9%)	5 (19.2%)	0 (0%)	7 (26.9%)
Aromanian	0 (0%)	4 (50%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (25%)

The biggest percentage of those who have negative feelings when speaking their language comes from the Vlach community: 23.7%. This can be definitely connected to the long history of prejudice of the majority Serbian population against this ethnic community and the resulting low language prestige among the members of the community (Durlić, 2023; Sorescu-Marinković & Huțanu, 2023). The same holds true for the Roma

community, which has been prejudiced against by the majority population for a long time (Bašić, 2021; Jakšić, 2015). Our research showed that 15.5% of the Roma have unpleasant feelings (feeling uncomfortable or ashamed) when speaking their language in the presence of Serbian language speakers. However, only Roma out of all language communities encompassed by the project reported feeling ashamed (not only uncomfortable) when speaking their language outside the community.

### *The Gender of the Respondents*

As far as the gender of the respondents is concerned, the Chi-square test for independence showed that there is no statistically significant relationship between it and the analysed answers to the five questions, except for the last one, *How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?* (Table 9). The results show that women are more prone to experiencing all the examined feelings than men when speaking their own language. The only exception is the neutral emotional experience, which men are slightly more inclined to. The value of Cramer's  $V = .142$ ,  $p < .05$  indicates that, for a table of these dimensions, the effect size is small (Palant, 2009).

*Table 9. The distribution of answers to the question XII\_2 according to the gender of the respondents*

XII_2. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?						
Gender ↓	Proud (%)	Comfortable (%)	As usual (%)	Uncomfortable (%)	Ashamed (%)	I don't know (%)
M (N=304)	40 (13.2%)	29 (9.5%)	139 (45.7%)	50 (16.4%)	0 (0%)	46 (15.1%)
F (N=342)	69 (20.2%)	37 (10.8%)	143 (41.8%)	46 (13.5%)	6 (1.8%)	41 (12%)

### *The Age of the Respondents*

In order to see whether the age of the respondents has a significant association with the variables in question, we used the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results showed that there is no statistically significant relationship between age and respondents' attitude towards maintaining and revitalising their language, or transmitting it to the younger generations.

Nevertheless, the results show that there is a statistically significant difference in age between the groups of respondents divided according to the importance that the introduction or retention of their vulnerable language in Serbian schools has for them ( $F(2, 668) = 7.335$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The results of the post hoc test (Tukey), which compares each group with each

other, show that respondents who consider it important to introduce or maintain the language in schools are statistically significantly younger than those who do not consider it important. Likewise, those who do not care about this question are statistically significantly younger than those who answered “NO.” There is no statistically significant difference in age between the group of respondents who answered affirmatively to this question and the group who do not care. In other words, the results show that younger respondents either do not think too much about the importance of introducing/maintaining their language in schools or consider it very important, while older respondents exhibit a clearly defined negative attitude toward this question. One possible interpretation of these findings might be that younger respondents or their children attended language classes themselves and therefore support introducing/maintaining their languages in education, but further research is needed.

Likewise, there is a statistically significant difference in the age of the respondents when we divide them according to the feelings they experience when they use their language in front of other speakers of the same language ( $F(5, 642) = 2.738, p < .05$ ). The results of a post hoc test (Tukey) imply that the only two groups that significantly differ from each other in terms of age are the group that feels proud to speak their language and the group that does not think about it. Table 10 shows that the first group is older than the second. There are no statistically significant differences in age between the other groups of respondents.

*Table 10. The distribution of answers to the question XII\_1 according to the age of the respondents*

XII_1. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of other speakers of your language?			
	Number of respondents (N)	Age	
		Mean	SD
Proud	147	49.83	16.667
Comfortable	173	48.59	16.848
As usual	280	46.86	15.357
Uncomfortable	7	43.86	12.415
Ashamed	9	39	19.216
I don't think about it	32	40.19	14.434
Total	648	47.58	16.164

Finally, the results show that there is also a statistically significant difference in the age of the respondents when we divide them according to the feelings they experience when using their vulnerable language in the presence of Serbian speakers ( $F(5, 638) = 2.867, p < .05$ ). The results of the post hoc test (Tukey) indicate that the only two groups that differ from each other in terms of age are the group that feels comfortable and the group that feels as usual. The first group is older than the second.

*The Education Level of the Respondents*

The chi-square test for independence showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the education level of the respondents and all the analysed variables, except for the importance the respondents put on the transmission of language to the younger generations ( $\chi^2$  (16, N = 678) = 23.287,  $p = .106$ ). More specifically, a statistically significant relationship was found between respondents' level of education and the following variables: the importance that preserving, revitalising, or learning the minority language holds for members of a given language community ( $\chi^2$  (16, N = 677) = 35.465,  $p < .01$ ); the importance of introducing or maintaining the minority language in Serbian schools for members of that language community ( $\chi^2$  (16, N = 673) = 34.372,  $p < .01$ ); the feelings experienced by minority language speakers when using their language in front of other speakers of the same language ( $\chi^2$  (40, N = 650) = 102.108,  $p < .01$ ); and the feelings experienced when speaking their language in the presence of Serbian speakers ( $\chi^2$  (40, N = 646) = 69.055,  $p < .01$ ).

Therefore, members of all education levels consider it important to preserve or learn their language, and to introduce or keep it in the school system. In other words, within each education level — except for the “Other” (the names of all levels are provided in Table 11) — the number of

*Table 11. The distribution of answers to the question XII\_2 according to the education level of the respondents*

XII_2. How do you feel when you speak your language in the presence of Serbian speakers?						
Education level ↓	Proud (%)	Comfortable (%)	As usual (%)	Uncomfortable (%)	Ashamed (%)	I don't know (%)
No school	4 (10.8%)	5 (13.5%)	15 (40.5%)	9 (24.3%)	1 (2.7%)	3 (8.1%)
Unfinished elementary school	20 (24.1%)	6 (7.2%)	37 (44.6%)	10 (12%)	4 (4.8%)	6 (7.2%)
Elementary school	16 (10.3%)	25 (16.1%)	74 (47.7%)	22 (14.2%)	1 (0.6%)	17 (11%)
Vocational school	15 (16.7%)	10 (11.1%)	38 (42.2%)	13 (14.4%)	0 (0%)	14 (15.6%)
High school	20 (15.7%)	7 (5.5%)	58 (45.7%)	19 (15%)	0 (0%)	23 (18.1%)
Higher vocational school	5 (13.5%)	5 (13.5%)	11 (29.7%)	9 (24.3%)	0 (0%)	7 (18.9%)
University	26 (27.7%)	6 (6.4%)	37 (39.4%)	11 (11.7%)	0 (0%)	14 (14.9%)
Postgraduate, PhD	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	11 (61.1%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.6%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)

respondents who consider it important to preserve or learn their language, and to introduce or maintain it in the school system, is greater than the number of those who do not or who are indifferent. However, given that only five respondents selected “Other” as their level of education, it can be concluded that this pattern holds across all education levels. Additionally, respondents of all levels of education have mainly pleasant feelings or feel as usual when they speak their language in the presence of others speakers of their language, as well as when they speak it in the presence of Serbian speakers. To save space, only the last of the above results—the relationship between level of education and feelings when speaking one’s language in the presence of Serbian speakers—will be presented in tabular form (Table 11).

Nevertheless, we should be careful in the interpretation of results, as in the case of the variables: language of the community, gender and education level the assumption of chi-square concerning the ‘minimum expected cell frequency’ has been violated in most of the cases. In those instances, it is recommended to consider Fisher’s Exact Test as a statistical indicator. However, although not shown here for space-saving, the Exact Test yielded the same results as the Chi-square.

### CONCLUSION

Our study focused on the assessment of attitudes of speakers of vulnerable languages in Serbia towards the maintenance and revitalisation of their languages, their transmission to the younger generation and introducing them into the school system, as well as on their feelings regarding speaking the language with the members of the community and outside the community. These variables were intersected with a series of demographic factors and with the target language of specific communities, to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation with any of them. We found out that, out of these factors, the language of the given community is the most important variable, which yields a statistically significant correlation with every other variable, while the gender of the respondents is the least important.

This finding supports the general conclusion that vulnerable or endangered languages and the communities who speak them should be treated individually, not only in Serbia, but around the world. Researchers of vulnerable or endangered languages should have a language and community specific approach, as should those trying to maintain or revitalise these languages. Therefore, the assessment of the level of vitality or endangerment should focus on individual linguistic varieties spoken in different territories, and avoid generalisations. Each linguistic community should be approached carefully, accounting for its unique characteristics, by researchers who possess the flexibility to adapt to individual languages, respondents and specific circumstances.

The findings of our study also show that age, gender, and education level are not related to certain aspects of language preservation and the feelings that speakers have towards their minority language. Additionally, the study indicates that respondents generally have positive attitudes towards the preservation of their languages, as they perceive language as an important factor of ethnic identity. This is partially in line with the *attitude shift* noticed by linguists in other endangered language contexts, which validates the hypothesis that there is currently a general tendency among speakers whose languages are endangered to value their language much more than before. However, attitudes are not actions and, in order for the language to widen its domains of use, to re-establish intergenerational transmission or to gain prestige, language planners and activists must focus their efforts in this direction.

A more specific conclusion of our research is connected to the attitudes of speakers of certain vulnerable languages in Serbia towards their introduction into the school system. As we have discussed above, very small language communities do not consider it important that their language is introduced in the school system. Additionally, some of the speakers of atomised languages, with several dialectal forms and a debated or no written standard, such as Banat Bulgarian, Romani and Vlach, might not consider it important or be indifferent to the possibility of the introduction of their language in the school system, as some of these languages or language varieties have a relatively large number of speakers, a long tradition of orality and a relatively good intergenerational transmission. On the other hand, respondents whose language is already taught in schools almost unanimously agree that it is important for it to be maintained in the school system.

Finally, although the majority of our respondents showed positive or neutral feelings when speaking their language in the presence of Serbian speakers, with the above-mentioned two linguistic varieties, Romani and Vlach, negative attitudes – feeling uncomfortable or ashamed – were also encountered. This can be definitely connected to the status of the two languages, which have only recently been standardised, the standard is not readily accepted by everybody, along with the long history of prejudice of the majority population against these two communities and low language prestige derived from this. Therefore, although speakers of vulnerable and endangered languages might show a tendency to positively evaluate their languages, efforts should be also directed towards raising awareness of the importance of language diversity among the majority language speakers.

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## JEZИЧКИ СТАВОВИ ИЗ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ ИНТЕРСЕКЦИОНАЛНОСТИ: РАЊИВИ ЈЕЗИЦИ И ЈЕЗИЧКИ ВАРИЈЕТЕТИ У СРБИЈИ

Анамарија Сореску-Маринковић<sup>1</sup>, Душан Влајић<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Балканолошки институт САНУ, Београд, Србија

<sup>2</sup>Универзитет у Нишу, Филозофски факултет, Ниш, Србија

### Резиме

Током последњих деценија постало је очигледно да је велики број језика који се говоре широм света угрожен. Стога лингвисти настоје да идентификују факторе који убрзавају губљење језика. Међу многим интерним и екстерним факторима, став говорне заједнице према сопственом језику данас је један од кључних фактора који убрзава губљење језика. То значи да говорници одређених, углавном мањинских језика, услед негативних стереотипа и дискриминације, и сами престају да цене свој језик, што доводи до стигматизације његове употребе и до прекида у међугенерациском преношењу.

Овај рад се заснива на резултатима квантитативног истраживања спроведеног 2023. године у Србији, на узорку од 686 говорника следећих рањивих језика и језичких варијетета: арумунски (30), банатски бугарски (29), војвођански русински (78), ладино (14), ромски (290), влашки (160) и бањашки румунски (85). Користећи низ квантитативних метода, циљ студије је био трострук. Први циљ био је да се процене ставови говорника рањивих језика према очувању и ревитализацији својих језика,

укључујући преношење на млађе генерације и увођење у школски систем. Други циљ био је да се процене њихова осећања у вези са коришћењем језика у разговору са члановима заједнице и са другим особама. Трећи циљ био је да се утврди да ли постоји статистички значајна корелација горепоменутих ставова и осећања са специфичним демографским факторима (старост испитаника, пол и ниво образовања) и језицима, за шта смо користили интерсекционалност као аналитичку методу.

Резултати наше студије подржавају општи закључак да рањиве или угрожене језике и заједнице које их говоре треба третирати индивидуално, будући да су разлози угрожености различитих језика врло специфични и варирају од заједнице до заједнице. Поред тога, истраживање је показало да старост, пол и ниво образовања нису у значајној мери повезани са одређеним аспектима очувања језика и осећањима која говорници имају према свом језику. На крају, али не мање важно, студија је показала да испитаници генерално имају позитивне ставове према очувању својих језика јер језик доживљавају као важан фактор етничког идентитета, што потврђује хипотезу да тренутно постоји општа тенденција међу говорницима угрожених језика да их много више вреднују него раније.