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Romani teaching in the Czech Republic

The purpose of this text is to describe the situation in the Czech Republic (CR) with regards to teaching Romani. The text is concentrated on the northern-central dialect of Romani, whose (former) speakers compose up to 75 percent of the current Romani population in the CR. Following a description of the current sociolinguistic situation of the dialect and the overview of the history of Romani teaching in the CR, the text concentrates on the current situation in the teaching of the language and summarizes the experience with the introduction of a course on northern-central Romani into a few Czech elementary schools, an experiment that was conducted in 2009 in the framework of a series of sociolinguistic researches (2007–2010) into the situation of Romani in the CR by the Seminar of Romani Studies (Department of Southern and Central Asia, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague). The author of the article has taken part in the research as a member of the coordinating team as well as a researcher.

I. Introduction: Roma in the CR

The current population of Roma in the CR is estimated to be about 200.000 people.¹ Like in all other European states, the Roma in the CR represent a heterogeneous minority group from the historic, anthropologic as well as linguistic point of view. The autochthonous Romani population of the historic Czech Lands (comprising Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) has been almost completely annihilated during the Second World War: out of the 6.500 Roma (we can expect composed mostly of the so called Czech/Moravian Roma and a certain number of Sinti) that have lived in the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, only about 1.000 individuals have survived the Nazi prosecution.² It is estimated that

1 Květa Kalibová, *Romové z pohledu demografie*, in: *Romové v České republice*, Praha 1999, p. 107.

2 Ctibor Nečas, *Holocaust českých Romů*, Praha 1999, p. 173.

these people now compose only up to five percent of the current Romani population in the CR, having been totally out-numbered by post-war Romani migrants from Slovakia.³

The major part of the post-war migration from Slovakia included members of sedentary Romani communities that have lived a settled life in Slovakia for centuries. Sharing a large part of the centuries' long history of sedentarization in mostly rural Slovakia as well as some cultural and linguistic features, but coming from different regions of Slovakia, the sedentary Roma from Slovakia are members of two similar but distinct sub-ethnic groups, for whom the name Slovak and Hungarian Roma is used in the ethnographic sense. Linguistically they belong to the group of northern- and southern-central Romani speakers.⁴ The northern-central Romani speakers represent the dominant part of the current Czech (as well as Slovak) Romani population (up to 75 percent in the CR), while southern-central Romani speakers are estimated to represent only up to 20 percent.⁵

Members of a traditionally travelling Romani group in Slovakia, the Lovara, have also joined in the post-war migration into the Czech lands. They represent a rather closed and conservative group and still keep a socio-cultural distance from the sedentarized Slovak and Hungarian Roma (as well as from the non-Roma), despite the fact that the Lovara themselves have been forced to settle down in Czechoslovakia in 1958/59. They speak the Lovara dialect, one of the northern-Vlax dialects of Romani. Their proportion is estimated to be up to 15 percent of the total Romani population in the CR.⁶

Important socio-cultural changes have taken place especially in the community of the Slovak and Hungarian Roma, traditionally more open to the influence of non-Roma viewed as the prestigious social group (in sharp contrast to the attitude of the Vlax Roma to the majority population). The (mutually interconnected) effects of the postwar migration and post-war developments in the whole of the country on the communities of the Roma included: urbanization, changes in work patterns and daily life, gradual weakening of social networks with the communities of origin and the increase in contacts with local non-Romani population as well as with other Roma from different regions of Slovakia

3 Milena Hübschmannová, *Můžeme se domluvit / Šaj pes dovakeras*, Olomouc 2002, p. 27.

4 Even though the terms Slovak Rom/northern-central Romani speaker and Hungarian Rom/southern-central Romani speaker have been used until recently interchangeably, the self-identification of northern-central Romani speakers as Slovak Roma and southern-central Romani speakers as Hungarian Roma is not a straightforward rule (even though it is common). For detailed discussion of this terminological problem see Viktor Elšík, *Interdialect contact of Czech (and Slovak) Romani varieties*, in: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 162 (2003), p. 41–62.

5 Milena Hübschmannová, *Můžeme se domluvit / Šaj pes dovakeras*, p. 27.

6 *Op.cit.*, p. 27.

that have (been) moved into the locality. Last but not least, the gradual process of cultural and language assimilation/disintegration has been strengthened by the policy of assimilation, implemented by the communist government since late 1950's aimed at the dissolution of the "citizens of gypsy origin" into the mass of the citizens of socialist Czechoslovakia. It was expected that as the material conditions of the arriving Romani families would improve in the new socialist state that was just being built, the Romani cultural heritage would be laid aside and forgotten. Strengthening this momentum, the assimilation ideology labeled Romani culture and tradition as backward and presented different elements of the Romani culture, including the language, as a barrier to their social mobility. As a result of the diverse social pressures and changes, many of the Slovak and Hungarian Roma have internalized to a different extent the contemptuous attitude towards (certain elements of) the Romani cultural heritage, including the language.⁷

II. Romani in the CR – sociolinguistic situation

It can be assumed that most of the Roma coming into the Czech lands after the Second World War spoke Romani and that Romani was the language of their primary socialization. Hübschmannová has described the general practice of the use of Romani and non-Romani code in the Slovakian source localities of the migration using the term diglossia: while Romani would be used in internal communication among the Roma, local majority non-Romani language (e.g. local dialects of Slovak, Hungarian, Ruthenian etc., depending on the locality) would be used for the communication with non-Roma.⁸ Since Roma in Slovakia lived for the most part in settlements often spatially separated from their majority neighbors, children would be brought up in Romani and start learning and using the non-Romani code only at the time when their contacts with non-Roma would increase. During late 1960's and early 1970's, changes in the use of Romani were already documented among the group of the speakers of the central dialects (Slovak and Hungarian

7 For detailed discussion of the effects of the assimilation policy and general socio-cultural changes in the community of the Slovak Roma, see Milena Hübschmannová, *Několik poznámek k hodnotám Romů*, in: *Romové v České republice (1945–1998)*, Praha 1999, p. 16–67. For an outline of the history of Roma in Czechoslovakia after 1945 see, for example Will Guy, *Ways of Looking at Roma (The Case of Czechoslovakia, 1975)*, in: Diane Tong (ed.), *Gypsies. An Interdisciplinary Reader*, New York/London 1998, p. 13–68.

8 Milena Hübschmannová, *Bilingualism among the Slovak Roms*, in: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 19 (1979), p. 33–49.

Roma) residing in Czech lands. Hübschmannová has observed that the use of Czech even in the internal communication in Romani environment is increasing in the group of northern-central speakers, among younger speakers in particular.⁹ Almost twenty years later Šebková uses a simplified three generations' model to describe the progress of language shift in the communities of northern-central speakers: according to her the first generation of migrants in the Czech lands as a general rule speaks Romani, the second generation largely only understands it, while the third generation no longer knows the language at all.¹⁰ Even though the process of gradual language shift towards Czech has been described among the communities of northern-central speakers, it is expected to apply to the communities of southern-central speakers as well. The Vlax Roma, on the contrary seem to have so far resisted it. Vlax Romani (Lovari) is still the primary communication code inside Vlax Romani community in the Czech Republic and the language of the primary socialization of the children.

During 2007–2010 a series of sociolinguistic researches has been conducted by the Seminar of Romani Studies (Department of Southern and Central Asia, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague) into the situation of Romani in the Czech Republic. The research was primarily concentrated on the issues of current competence in Romani among school-aged children, the acquisition and intergenerational transmission of the language, language use and language attitudes.

The research allowed for the first time to base the estimate on the competence in Romani among the youngest generation of possible users on extensive data. For the purpose of this part of the research, we organized a “Romani language contest” in 64 schools in 44 Czech and Moravian municipalities, targeting more than 1.100 pupils.¹¹ The contest was designed to fit in one school lesson (45 minutes) during which the participants (groups of 10–15 pupils) were asked to compete in different language tasks (to choose appropriate antonyms for different words, to complete Romani sentences and to fill in a listening comprehension test). The whole session was moderated in Romani – if possible, given the general competence in Romani in the group – and framed by introductory and close-up interviews with the participants. The participants could choose the

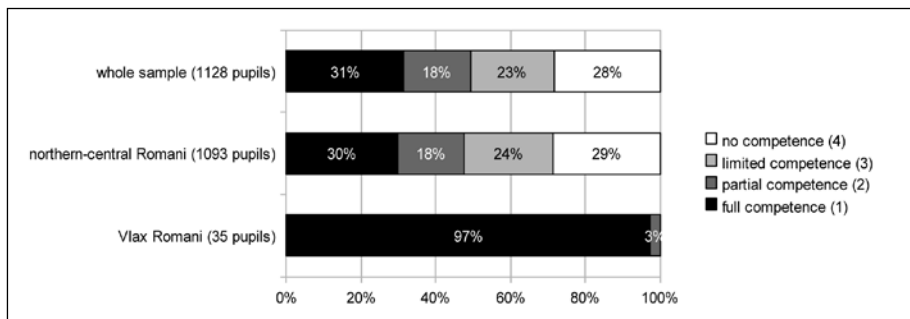
9 Op.cit., p. 44.

10 Hana Šebková, *Jazyková situace Romů a její vývoj*, Praha 1995, p. 8.

11 For a detailed discussion of the methodology of the contest and its limits, see Pavel Kubaník/Helena Sadílková/Jan Červenka, *Romani language competence and intergenerational transmission in the Czech Republic*, in: Barbara Schrammel-Leber/Barbara Tiefenbacher, *Romani V. Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Graz 2011, Graz 2013, pp. 61–80.

language of their communication with the moderators/researchers (Romani or Czech), which allowed for the participation of children with passive knowledge of Romani. Two researchers were present during the session, dividing amongst themselves the task of moderating the session, monitoring language behavior of the pupils, and recording the results and observations. After the end of each of the session, the researchers were asked to evaluate the competence in Romani of the participants based on the observation of their language behavior during the whole of the session. The evaluation was later correlated with the pupils' scores in the competition as well as with the audio recording of the whole session to arrive at the final estimate of the competence in Romani of the individual pupils. The level of competence was indicated using a four-point scale: 1– fully competent speakers; 2 – partially competent speakers (i.e. understand Romani but have difficulties with speaking); 3 – speakers with limited competence (i.e. have problems with understanding and rather limited speaking competencies); 4 – pupils with no or very basic competence in Romani (i.e. understand some basic words/phrases for example).

The contest was prepared in two dialect versions (northern-central Romani and Lovari) as we hoped to target the children from all three dominant sub-ethnic/dialect Romani groups (children of the speakers of northern- and southern-central dialect of Romani, and Lovara dialect). However, the participants from the group of northern-central speakers dominated the sample: only three percent, i.e. 35 pupils in the sample, were from Vlax Romani families, and only one girl identified herself as southern-central Romani speaker. We therefore relate our findings exclusively to the northern-central dialect of Romani but point out that they are most probably relevant to the situation of southern-central Romani in the CR as well since it is largely supposed that (the changes in) the vitality of the two central dialects are comparable.



Graph no. 1.: Competence in Romani related to dialect group

While the results for the Vlax Romani speakers prove the assumption of high competence in Romani, the results for the group of children from northern-central Romani background show considerable loss of the language.

Bearing in mind certain limits of the methodology used, the relative representativeness of the sample allows for the statement that in the Czech Republic among the present-day Romani children of school age from northern-central dialect group, we can expect a maximum of approximately one-third to be fully competent speakers of Romani. There is also a considerably high proportion of children with only passive knowledge of Romani (participants with limited or partial competence) – a feature that is characteristic not only for the children but of the (especially younger) adult northern-central Romani speakers in the CR.

III. Romani teaching in the Czech Republic: history, contemporary situation

In March 2007, the Charter for regional or minority languages has entered into force in the Czech Republic. By ratifying the document, the Czech Republic has agreed to support, under the Charter, four minority languages – Polish, Slovak, German, and Romani. While the state has bound itself to apply specific selected provisions of Part III of the Charter to Polish and Slovak languages, to German and Romani languages only the more general provisions of Part II of the Charter are to be applied.¹² The Romani teaching is subsumed under one of these provisions (Charter, Part II, Article 7, Par. 1f)¹³ and Romani education in particular has become an issue in the Committee of Experts' evaluation report after the first monitoring cycle in December 2009, with the Committee of Experts encouraging the Czech Republic “to take immediate interim measures to improve the situation”.¹⁴

12 See the List of declarations made with respect to treaty No. 148 (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/ngos/default_en.asp (accessed Aug. 30, 2012).

13 Charter for the Regional or Minority Languages, English version of the text of the Charter, available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/textcharter/default_en.asp (The Charter), (accessed Aug. 30, 2012).

14 See the Report of the Committee of Experts on the Charter, in: Application of the Charter in Czech Republic, first monitoring cycle, Strasbourg 2009, p. 15, available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/Report/default_en.asp (State reports), (accessed Aug. 30, 2012).

Romani has been used on the territory of Czechoslovakia until quite recently almost exclusively as a language of internal oral communication between the members of a socially underestimated minority. We can speculate that Romani might have been used (as an auxiliary language of education) in a handful of elementary schools established in the 1920's in the eastern part of the then Czechoslovakia (famously in Uzhgorod, the former capital of Subcarpathian Ukraine, a Romani school, i.e. school for Romani children from the local Romani settlement has been founded in close cooperation with the local Roma;¹⁵ a few similar schools were also established in eastern Slovakia in the same time, following the example).¹⁶ Similarly, in the early 1950's, before the communist regime has adopted the policy of assimilation towards its Romani inhabitants, the idea of using Romani in early school education was contemplated and perhaps even implemented in some of the few schools/classes for Romani children that came into existence at that time. The information on the real situation in the schools in both of the two mentioned periods is however very fragmentary.

After more than a decade of a strong assimilation pressure, the idea of using Romani in early school education has been revived in late 1960's, during the existence of a republic-wide Romani organization Union of Gypsies-Roma (established in 1969 in the aftermath of the Prague Spring) that has attempted to step into and become a partner of the state administration in the process of the development of state policy towards the Roma and its implementation.¹⁷ However, the suggestions to use Romani as auxiliary language in the elementary school education of Romani children until they would become fully competent in Czech published in the organization's program and policy outline in 1970¹⁸ never materialized as the Union of Gypsies-Roma was forcibly dissolved in 1973. Since then, the presence of Romani (or rather, its absence) in the elementary and secondary school system has not been discussed until recently.

The only possibility to learn or develop Romani inside the state educational framework was enabled in courses of Romani for the general public that were taught at the

15 Karel Sommer, *Cikánská škola v Užhorodě*, in: *Slezský sborník* 92, 2 (1994), p. 106–112.

16 Anna Jurová/Eva Zupková, *Rómovia v Košiciach v 1. ČSR v kontexte doby i regionu (1918–1938)*, in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 16 (2007), p. 105–111.

17 Petr Lhotka, *Svaz Cikánů-Romů 1969–1973*, in: Milada Závodská/Michal Schuster (eds.), *Svaz Cikánů-Romů 1969–1973, Doprovodná publikace k výstavě Muzea romské kultury „Svaz Cikánů-Romů (1969–1973) – z historie první romské organizace v českých zemích“*, Brno 2009, p. 5–23.

18 *Memorandum k základním otázkám romské (cikánské) problematiky a vymezení společenského postavení Romů (Cikánů)*, in: *Románo lil* 2 (1970), p. 11–13.

Prague State Language School since early 1980's. The courses were organized and lead by Milena Hübschmannová, one of the founders of Czech Romani studies (as the discipline has developed since early 1950's). The courses were attended by Roma (mostly Romani activists and/or beginning writers, friends of M. Hübschmannová) as well as non-Roma (mostly people who felt the need to use Romani in their work, including a group of Prague social workers).¹⁹

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Romani – exclusively as a teaching subject – was gradually introduced into a couple of schools at the secondary and tertiary education level, quite often as a part of a distant learning curriculum for adults working in the field of social work. Until today, only one secondary school has included Romani into its daily study curriculum²⁰ – a secondary vocational school founded by a well known Romani politician, Emil Ščuka. The school, originally founded in Kolín as a school for social work and law, has developed over the years into a network of secondary vocational schools and continues to be attended predominantly by Romani youth.

With the exception of the Kolín school network, Romani is today taught only in adult learning courses, mostly at university level and/or as distant learning courses at secondary vocational schools for students/practitioners in the field of social work and pedagogy (Pedagogical faculties at the Universities of Brno, Ostrava, and Prague), or students of anthropology/ethnography (University in Pardubice). The Charles University in Prague offers also a university degree in Romani language at the Faculty of Arts (Seminar of Romani Studies, Department of Southern and Central Asia, established in 1991 by Milena Hübschmannová). The only courses of Romani available for general public are offered by Museum of Romani Culture in Brno. So far, no teacher training courses have been developed, the current teachers of Romani are mostly recruited from the alumni of the Seminar of Romani Studies at Charles University, Prague, or native speakers of the language (or both, ideally, unfortunately only in a few cases). It should be underlined that in all of the so far mentioned courses the northern-central dialect of Romani exclusively is taught. The only courses on Vlax Romani are part of the MA degree study at the Seminar of Romani Studies at Charles University.

19 For a more detailed information on the courses of Romani in Prague State Language School, see Helena Sadílková, *La littérature romani en République tchèque: sources et état actuel*, in: *Études Tsiganes* 37, 2 (2009), p. 189–190.

20 It should be pointed out that in the Czech educational system elementary schools traditionally offer primary (five years) and lower secondary education (four years), while secondary schools cover the upper secondary education (four years).

IV. Experimental courses of Romani

The Czech legislation allows for the introduction of (national) minority languages into the regular educational network (as languages of instruction or as school subjects) at the primary as well as secondary level, under certain conditions.²¹ The first preliminary condition is the presence of ten percent minority population (i.e. including all minorities' members) in the given municipality, according to the self-declaration in the census, which allows for the establishment of a local committee for national minorities.²² The existence of the committee in turn is the first condition for the introduction of the minority language into education at the municipal level.²³ The limits for opening a class with the instruction in a minority language are then eight, ten and twelve pupils in the class at the level of preschool, primary and secondary education respectively (these limits can be lowered in the case of introducing the minority language as a teaching subject). So far, it have been the members of the German, Polish, and Slovak minority that have pressed the administration of the introduction of their minority language in the local schools or have even already established schools with minority language as the language of instruction. Apart from different reasons, the current sociolinguistic situation of the central dialects of Romani in particular and the fact that Romani for historic reasons has its functional limits as a language of predominantly oral and internal communication practically rules out the introduction of Romani as a language of instruction. The introduction of Romani as a school subject is however a step that can be considered, and that has been actually announced by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in March 2010 with regards to the support of the language.²⁴ The fact that there is no experience with the instruction of Romani at the level of primary or lower secondary education as well as the absence of age-appropriate teaching materials and teacher training programs makes such a move a rather problematic one.

21 National Minorities Act No. 273/2001.

22 Act on Municipalities No. 128/2000 Coll.

23 Education Act No. 561/2004 Coll.

24 In the reaction to the announcement a Facebook campaign "We oppose the introduction of Romani into Czech schools" has been created, gathering almost 40.000 supporters in five days, see Romea: Desitky tisíc lidí odmítají na internetu romštinu ve školách, www.romea.cz, 23.3.2010, available at <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravy/desitky-tisic-lidi-odmitaji-na-internetu-romstinu-ve-skolach> (accessed Aug. 30, 2012), and featuring rather xenophobic or racist remarks – see the information and commentary on the campaign in The Times (Adam Lebor, Facebook campaign to stop plans for Romani lessons in Czech Republic, in: Times, 2.4.2010, available at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk>). The issue was in the center of Czech media interest for a few days and then disappeared from the public debate.

In 2009, in the framework of a series of sociolinguistic researches into the situation of Romani in the CR (2007–2010) by the Seminar of Romani Studies (Department of Southern and Central Asia, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague), we have designed a short experimental course on Romani language²⁵ and piloted it at five elementary schools in the CR in order to test the conditions of establishing such a course on the ground and possible teaching materials to be used as well as in order to gather general experience with the introduction of such a course.

The experience with the sociolinguistic situation of northern-central Romani in the diverse localities across the Czech Republic as well as with the different local school environments gathered during the sociolinguistic research conducted by the Seminar of Romani Studies during the two preceding years was used in the targeting and preparation of the course. We have decided to target pupils with full or partial competence in Romani (see at the scale introduced in part II of the text: Romani in the CR – sociolinguistic situation). The decision followed the most realistic logic of the use of Romani teaching as a support of the language as an endangered one: it seems to us that the use of such an instrument has the largest potential in localities where Romani is still used in the generation of the current pupils or only starts to retreat from the position of language in use. The aim of the course thus was not to teach Romani to beginners, but to develop certain language skills and areas of language knowledge that are in general underdeveloped among native speakers of Romani (such as reading and writing, or the general knowledge of the grammatical structure of the language). Given the goals of the course, we have decided to concentrate on pupils at the lower secondary level (which is part of the so called elementary school as an institution – see footnote no. 20) who – we would expect – were already familiar with reading and writing in Czech even though to a considerably limited extent in the case of pupils from the so-called practical schools.²⁶ The choice of the locality and school was based upon our knowledge of the situation of Romani in the given municipality as well as the existence of an atmosphere favorable to such an experiment, on the side of the headmaster and teachers as well as on the side of Romani parents.

25 The course was designed as an eight lesson course. We are aware of the fact that the course was rather short to enable a deeper insight into the possibilities of Romani teaching at schools. In fact, after the eight lessons, the participating pupils only started to understand the logic and content of such a Romani course. We however believe even the short term observations and experience are valuable for possible future development and organization of Romani courses.

26 I.e. former „special schools“ educating pupils with learning and mental disabilities, into which a large percentage of Romani children has been sidelined from the mainstream education. The practical schools follow an educational program adjusted to incorporate pupils with the above mentioned handicaps. Out of the five schools that have participated at the experiment, only one represented a regular mainstream elementary school.

Finally, five schools have been chosen to participate at the experiment in different parts of Bohemia and Moravia. In four of them the course was organized as an after-school activity, demanding an extra effort from the pupils, in one of them, the agreement was made to incorporate the course into the weekly teaching program. This was possible given the content and aim of the course (Romani class substituted once a week a lesson dedicated to the practice of reading) and relatively short time needed for the implementation of the whole course (eight weeks). Such an arrangement was extremely favorable since the drop-out rate in the after school courses was considerable.²⁷ In fact, two of the four afterschool courses had to be cancelled all together due to drop-out as well as due to high level of fluctuation of the pupils (new pupils arriving at each of the sessions) which made continuous work impossible. On the other hand, the pupils who stayed especially in the two remaining afterschool courses represented the most motivated ones – three of them have not missed a lesson, and two of them missed just once. Three pupils among them were evaluated as problematic by their headmaster: one of them was said to have frequent problems with his behavior in class (in fact, the headmaster warned us not to include him in the course in fear he would spoil all of the lessons – such problems were never encountered during the course) and two of them were described as rather careless in their work at school as well as with their homework preparation (both of them came to Romani classes regularly with their homework ready).

As far as the content of the course is concerned, the course was composed so as to incorporate different language tasks (reading, writing, translation) as well as different topics, including those frequented in the existing (northern central) Romani textbooks (such as themes relating to the oral culture and history of Slovak Roma, for example) but also topics related to the given municipality, or the pupils' language background and attitudes. Some parts of the lessons were designed so as to develop the pupils' knowledge of Romani as well (writing rules, some parts of the grammar structure, expansion of vocabulary). The pupils' tolerance as native speakers of Romani to neologisms and words from different Romani dialects was also tested.²⁸

27 The Romani course was visited at least once by 60 pupils altogether, but only about 1/3 of them have attended more than four lessons (i.e. half of the course).

28 For detailed analysis of the course and for the materials used see the final report from the project *Výzkum a ověření možností práce s romštinou na školách*, and its attachments, available at http://www.romistika.eu/?c_id=382&pre=1 (Projects from 2009).

Concluding remarks

The above mentioned Romani course has been implemented in 2009 in the framework of a sociolinguistic research concentrated on the one hand on determining the current competence of children of school-age in Romani and on the other hand on the investigation of the actual sociolinguistic situation of Romani with regards to language use and language attitudes in several chosen localities (including those the course has taken place in). The experience gathered allows for the drawing of several conclusions on the level of the course preparation as well as with regards to the current context of Romani teaching. It seems that the issue of introducing Romani into Czech schools is a challenge not only because of the lack of available infrastructure (i.e. design of teaching materials, teacher training courses, etc.) but also because of the mental set up of all players involved.

The preparation of the content and aims of a Romani language course should be based on the information on the competence of the targeted pupils in Romani (while it should be borne in mind that the situation varies from locality to locality) as well as on the general language skills of pupils (even basic language skills such as reading and writing might vary depending on the type of the school the pupils have attended).

During the process of rising support for a Romani course among the parents, one might encounter rather mixed attitudes to Romani as a minority language. Possible reservations might also stem from the fact that i) the speakers of Romani have been until rather recently discouraged from using Romani in the public as well as at home, often by school teachers themselves; ii) certain part of the speakers has internalized the idea of Romani as useless language that is in itself a barrier to their children's successful educational trajectory; iii) there is in general almost no experience, on the side of the speakers of Romani, with institutional study of their language, its writing rules and grammatical structure, and the absence of any user-defined experience with a Romani course might make it rather difficult to imagine the content and aim of a Romani course. Quite frequently, the school environment is regarded as an ultimately Czech-language environment. Moreover, some of the respondents fear a negative response from the majority society in case of opening the discussion on the introduction of Romani into schools or in the case of insisting on the implementation of such a move.

The absence of sufficient information on the language repertoire of the pupils on the side of the teachers has been repeatedly observed in the different schools visited. Some teachers tend to underestimate or even downplay the competence

in Romani of their pupils (for example supposing the pupils can express in Romani only vulgarities). There is also a considerable lack of information on the specific issues of bilingual competence and the influence of Romani language on the structure of the Czech language as it is used by the pupils (and their parents). Romani courses, especially if organized in such a way that Romani becomes part of the language landscape of the schools, have the potential of changing the stereotypical attitudes towards Romani or at least open up new ways of thinking about the language.

