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The rural linguistic landscape of Banat***

Abstract

While the main body of linguistic landscape (LL) research still focuses on urban areas, more recent works have broadened the scope and conceptualisation of LL to include rural spaces. However, these works almost exclusively examine the Global North or the Global South. Suspended somewhere between the Global North and the Global South, the so-called Global East, to which Southeast Europe belongs, is for the most part excluded not just from notions of globality, but also from LL studies. The aim of this paper is to redirect the focus of LL research to a rural area in the Global East, namely, the village Ečka in the Serbian Banat, a region with a specific and lengthy history of multilingualism. We hold that the typologies used for the study of urban LL cannot yield relevant results if applied to rural LL. Our study is based on data collected in 2020 and 2021 during six field trips to Ečka which resulted in more than 300 photographs containing inscriptions in different languages and scripts. Furthermore, we conducted

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participant observation by recording interviews and collecting walking narratives from locals in Serbian or Romanian. Our study confirmed that there is a gap between the official multiculturalism and multilingualism policy as declared and implemented by top-down agents and the gradual transition to monolingualism and monoscriptalism at the bottom-up level. Therefore, instead of the classical top-down and bottom-up distinction, we propose seeing the village space from a two-fold perspective: the synchronic LL, which mirrors the current use of languages, language prestige and language policies, and the memorial LL, which is a chronicle of the multilingualism of past generations and welcomes a diachronic perspective of LL.

The term linguistic landscape (hereafter LL) was institutionalised in the prominent definition by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) as 'the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings'. Central to the approach of the LL as a sociolinguistic field of study is the understanding of space not only as a physically delimited place, but also as a socially and culturally constructed and organised place (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010: 7; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael & Barni 2010: XI; Canakis 2017: 232). Language is one of the most important vehicles for the social and cultural construction of space, though by far not the only one (Troyer & Szabó 2017: 58).

People linguistically shape the places they inhabit in such a way that the places reflect certain symbolic social features, such as group identities, status, ideologies and values, among others. Comprehensive studies of LLs worldwide have shown that the occurrence and spatial distribution of various linguistic resources (languages and/or scripts) are dynamic and indicative of prevailing or contested political, social, economic, legal and cultural circumstances (cf. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Gorter 2006; Jaworski & Thurlow 2010; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael & Barni 2010; Canakis & Kersten-Pejanić 2016; Canakis 2017).

However, the LL typologies developed for urban areas that have road signs, business and shopping centres with advertising billboards, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings may not apply in rural regions, where the landscape is replete with small unmarked roads and paths

and unplanned housing, with no business centres or commercial inscriptions. Therefore, 'rural and urban cultures may produce and consume signage differently' (Banda & Jimaima 2015: 648).

The aim of this paper is to direct the focus of LL research, which to date, has mainly been centred upon urban areas, to a rural site in the Global East, namely, Banat, and present a possible typology of the LL of this region with a specific and lengthy history of multilingualism. Although we concentrate on a single region in this article, we would like to stimulate further research, especially comparative empirical studies with a transregional focus. The regions that historically belonged to the Habsburg Empire could be particularly informative in this sense. Our results are based on field research conducted in 2020 and 2021 in the village of Ečka in the Serbian Banat.

In the following sections, we first introduce rural LLs (RLLs) as an emerging area of research within LL studies and then, address some key points on multilingualism, language policy and the general sociolinguistic situation in Banat relevant to our research. After presenting the data and research methodology, in the central section of the paper, we discuss the analysis results and the possible typology of RLLs. In the last section, we offer some conclusions and outlooks for further research.

Studying RLL within LL studies

The extra linguistic rationale in numerous LL studies is provided by complex social developments such as migration and globalisation, as well as gender issues, the culture of remembrance, mass tourism and the entangled interaction between on- and offline LL communities (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010; Barni and Bagna 2015; Tufi 2017; Oštarić 2018; Blommaert & Maly 2019; Zhao 2021). The prominence of this specific contextual framing is intrinsically connected to the focus of LL studies on urban areas. From the very beginning, LL studies have focused on urban spaces, which prompted Gorter (2006: 2) to say that 'instead of calling it the linguistic landscape it could also be named linguistic cityscape'.

Recent studies have broadened the scope and conceptualisation of LL to include rural spaces. However, studies of linguistic/semiotic landscapes in

rural areas are still rare. Zabrodskaja and Milani (2014: 1) pointed out that such studies comprise only one out of nine articles in their journal's special issue. This bias is understandable, as LLs emerged as a discipline in contexts where a certain degree of writing and reading culture was present, which are most often urban areas. Pennycook (2009: 308) noted that landscaping should also be seen as 'what culture does to nature', given that the cultural experiences and materialities in urban areas are not exactly similar to those in rural areas.

This is most obvious in the oral language-dominant rural communities of the Global South with limited or no written culture, upon which a portion of the studies dealing with RLLs concentrate. Thus, Banda & Jimaima (2015) employed the notion of *repurposing* to show how people from rural areas of South-Central Africa use the system of signage to transcend the limitations of the material conditions in the rural landscapes by applying memory, objects, artefacts and cultural materialities already in place to new uses and extended meaning potentials. On the other hand, du Plessis (2012) attested to the erasure of Afrikaans coinciding with increased monolingualisation (Anglicisation) in the rural southern Free State of South Africa that was fuelled by the lack of language visibility regulations, while Juffermans & Coppoolse (2012) examined literacy in the rural regions of Gambia.

In the Global North, however, even languages with small numbers of speakers are represented in RLLs, as attested by several studies. Daveluy & Ferguson (2009) looked into the way in which Inuit languages are used on road signs in northeast Canada, while Pietikäinen et al. (2011) examined the LL of Sami-speaking villages in the border area between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

Commodification, globalisation and tourism in rural areas represent other points of focus of LL research studies in the Global North. Reershemius (2011) discussed the commodification of Low German in RLL of northwest Germany and examined the specific approach to tourism developed by individuals and communities in Low German-speaking Northern Germany (2020). Laitinen (2014) analysed the use of English as an indicator of globalisation in parts of rural and urban Finland.

Suspended somewhere between the Global North and the Global South, the Global East (Müller 2020) is also marginally represented in LL studies

focusing on rural areas. The few studies on the region concentrate mainly on the LLs of village cemeteries (Huțanu & Sorescu-Marinković 2016; Sikimić & Nomachi 2016), as cemeteries are among the most important public places in villages, with a significant share of visible signage, considering the lack of other inscriptions.

One of the main challenges in defining a distinct scope, goal and methodology for RLL studies is the very definition of 'rural'. From the existing RRL studies, it is apparent that rural is defined differently in the Global North and the Global South (Reershemius 2020: 132). The Global East is also very diverse in this regard. It is defined as 'a liminal space' between the Global North and South, with some similarities to the South (for example, experience of post colonialism in some parts) and the North (for example, affiliation to symbolic Europe), while simultaneously being different from both (Müller 2020: 735-8). For this reason, we adopted the definition of rural commonly used in Serbia, to which Ečka, the object of our research, belongs.

In Serbia, the number of inhabitants is one of the most important criteria when defining a settlement as rural or urban (Mitrović 2015: 30). Accordingly, settlements with less than 2,000 inhabitants are considered villages (Mitrović 2015: 30). However, due to various reasons (such as historical development, economic structure and administrative regulations), there are settlements in Vojvodina with more than 2,000 inhabitants that are still considered villages (Mitrović 2015: 58). From a total of 466 settlements in Vojvodina, 414 are considered villages (Košić 2009: 67).Villages in this region usually have an orthogonal layout out, with streets that intersect at 90 degrees and the village centre at the intersection point of two main streets (Košić 2009: 28). Furthermore, the socio-cultural criterion applies to villages in Vojvodina, so that one can distinguish between monoethnic and multi-ethnic villages and 'traditional' and newly formed (after WWI and WWII) villages (Košić 2009: 33). This last criterion is relevant to LL studies in general, therefore, we considered the villages of Vojvodina to be highly suited for investigations in the RLL field, both empirically and in order to further develop the theoretical and methodological frameworks within LL studies.

The Cultural Region of Banat:
Multilingualism, Language Policy and Sociolinguistic Situation

While the formation of the Banat region dates back to the Roman times (cf. Wolf 2008), the period of the Habsburg rule, particularly after the revolution of 1848, is the most relevant for our considerations of the multiculturalism and multilingualism of the region. If Latin was the language of administration and education in the Habsburg Empire until the end of the 18th century, the vernacular languages of this region began to gain an increasingly important status in the public sphere afterwards. The key turning point in the language policy development of this region was Joseph II's decision to follow the example of linguistic centralisation in other large European countries and introduce literary German as the official state language instead of Latin by the decree of 1784, which permitted the use of the languages of traditional ethnic communities at a regional level (van der Plank 2012: 374).

In 1848, the Vienna government formed a territorial structure called the Serbian Duchy and Temes Banat as a new Austrian crown land (Krestić 2003: 16; Wolf 2008: 908; Stjepanović 2018: 138). The administrative centre of the new region was Timișoara, and the linguistic and ethnic composition of this crown land was highly heterogenous. According to the 1850/51 census, the region had 1,426,221 inhabitants, out of which, Romanians were the most numerous (397,459), followed by Germans (335,080), Serbs (321,110), Hungarians (221,845) and Bulgarians, Bunjevacs, Czechs, Greek, Jews, Roma, Rusyn, Slovaks, Šokci and Vlachs (Krestić 2003: 18). Although this form of administrative organisation crown land as a form of administrative organisation did not last long, it influenced the perception of the region as a particular cultural area characterised by multiculturalism and multilingualism (Wolf 2008: 909).

The general Habsburg language policy also applied to this region. As Haslinger (2008: 82) emphasised, linguistic and cultural diversity and the associated language policy in the Habsburg Empire had always been instruments of governmental legitimisation (cf. also Judson 2017). Thus, German (since 1794) and Hungarian (since 1868) were elevated to state languages in order to strengthen the centralisation of the empire (Haslinger 2008: 82; Judson 2017: 376). Other languages were used in different political domains such as administration, education and the military. However, as Judson (2019: 20)

pointed out, 'in practice these political rights treated language users as if they were belonging to blocks of people located in particular territories', which accounted for asymmetric language rights in language use. This was visible especially in the urban-rural division, at least until the middle of the 19th century, when nation-building aspirations throughout the empire brought about the proliferation of *Volkssprachen* (Stergar 2019: 54).

At the end of WWI, Banat was divided between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), Romania and Hungary. In the following sections, we will exclusively focus on the Serbian part of Banat.

Language policies in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes reflected two contradictory ethno-national ideologies: linguistic unification on the one hand, and linguistic diversification on the other (Petrović 2009: 39). However, these developments concerned only the languages of the three largest South Slavic ethnic groups living in the kingdom: Serbian, Croatian and Slovene. The language rights of other nationalities living in the kingdom were regulated by the Treaty of Saint-Germain (1919) and a few national acts, in which the right to education in minority languages was granted (Obradović 2018: 1171-3). Only the first census of 1921 contained the category of mother tongue, while the subsequent censuses used only religion as a defining factor (Obradović 2018: 1171-3). According to the 1921 census, German was the most dominant nationality (513,472), followed by Hungarian (472,409), Romanian (229,398), Czech and Slovak (115,532) and Rusyn (25,615)[1] (Obradović 2018: 1174). Obradović (2018) noticed that in practice, the status and degree of language rights implementation depended on the bilateral relations between the kingdom and the country in question. Here, Germans, Romanians, Czechs and Slovaks were in a better position than Hungarians (Obradović 2018: 1175). However, in the Banat region, Stjepanović's (2018: 148) general assessment that 'minority-majority relations were completely inverted to those in the previous period' holds true.

After WWII, the situation changed abruptly, especially due to the decimation of the large linguistic-cultural community of Germans. One of the two fundamental principles of the new state organisation, that of *vlast naroda* ('rule of the people'),[2] played a decisive role in structuring the language policy

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[1] Here are listed only those groups that also lived in the Banat region.
[2] The other principle was *društvena svojina* ('social property').

using the specific distinction between people (*narod*) and ethnicity/nationality (*narodnost*) (Brozović 1990: 17). Additionally, the category of the languages of the so-called ethnic groups was introduced; the ethnic groups were not considered nationalities due to various factors. Linguist August Kovačec (1990: 69f) attributed this to the following reasons, among others: Germans became an ethnic group (and not a nationality) because of underrepresentation; Vlachs, because of unclear differentiation; and Roma, because of their specific lifestyle.

All three Constitutions of Socialist Yugoslavia (1946, 1963 and 1974), granted national minorities the right to use their distinctive cultures and languages.[3] According to Stjepanović (2018: 150), the rights of non-Serb ethnic communities in Vojvodina also began to improve after 1950. In 1974, multilingualism was institutionalised by the first Constitution of the Social Province of Vojvodina (Stjepanović 2018: 150).

However, it is important to emphasise that the region's multiculturalism and multilingualism cannot be described as a long-term and stable state at any point (Tomić 2016: 30), especially if we consider the gap between the top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The regulations and language policy after 1945, and especially after 2000 (see below) can be described as liberal and inclusive. Yet, the effects of migration and assimilation, especially after WWII, in the regions of Vojvodina and Banat cannot be overlooked. These effects particularly concern the continuously increasing number of Serbs and decreasing number of all other ethnic groups (Raduški 2010: 342; Tomić 2016: 26f). Furthermore, attitudes towards the languages of national minorities provide significant insight into a possible transition to monolingualism in Vojvodina (Belić 2014: 17). In a recent sociological study on language and the image of multiculturalism in Vojvodina, Pušić (2008: 187) showed that language attitudes (also measured by the reduced necessity to learn a minority language) are negative among the younger population, Serbs as an ethnic group and the Christian Orthodox population. Pušić (2008: 175) concluded 'that there is an unstable social basis for sustainable multiculturalism'. The study of RLLs can provide further data on the functional level of contemporary

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[3] Constitution 1946, Art. 13: http://mojustav.rs/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Ustav1946.pdf; Constitution 1963, Art. 41 and 43: http://mojustav.rs/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Ustav-SFRJ-iz-1963.pdf; Constitution 1974, Art. 170 and 171: http://www.verfassungen.net/yu/verf74-i.htm, retrieved on May 12, 2021.

multilingualism in Vojvodina and Banat, thus complementing sociological, cultural and linguistic studies on multiculturalism.

Today, Article 7 of the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina from 2014 states that multilingualism, multiculturalism and freedom of religion constitute values of special interest for the province.[4] In Article 24, the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script, as well as Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian and Ruthenian and their respective scripts are defined as official languages. In addition, there are several specific laws that regulate the right to use languages and scripts other than Serbian and the other five official languages in the public space (for a comprehensive overview, cf. Raduški 2010: 344; Belić 2014: 10f; Beretka 2016: 524).[5] Finally, as Beretka (2016: 524) pointed out, several other factors play a decisive role in proclaiming a language of a particular ethnic group as official at the local level, which is also the decision of the local government. Here, local power struggles can be decisive in regard to the issue of minority language rights (Beretka 2016: 512).

Although Vojvodina is said to be highly heterogenous, national groups living here are characterised, on the one hand, by a higher concentration and national homogenisation in several municipalities (for example, Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks), and on the other hand, by spatial dispersion without ethnic domination (Raduški 2010: 344). In Banat, and particularly in the municipality of Zrenjanin (excluding the city of Zrenjanin), which the village Ečka is a part of, 22 ethnic groups are listed in the last 2011 census, of which Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks and Roma are the most numerous.[6]

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[4] https://www.skupstinavojvodine.gov.rs/Strana.aspx?s=statut&j=SRL, retrieved on May 14, 2021.

[5] For example, Ukrainian is acknowledged according to the European Charta of Minority Languages, although the ethnic group of Ukrainians does not exceed 15% (census cut-off according to the Law on Official Use of Languages and Scripts in Serbia), i.e. 25% (census cut-off for Vojvodina, Beretka 2016: 515) of the population in any of municipalities. Romani, on the other hand, does and it is recognised as a protected language according to the Charta. Still, to our knowledge, the language is not present in public in any of the municipalities in Vojvodina.

[6] https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-latn/oblasti/popis/popis-2011/popisni-podaci-eksel-tabele/, Table: Population in cities and municipalities according to national affiliation and sex, retrieved on May 10, 2021.

The Village Ečka: Historical, Demographic and Linguistic Considerations

Ečka is a village in Banat located 10 km south of the city of Zrenjanin, but practically connected with it via the industrial zone. During the course of history, the majority of the population has comprised Romanians, Serbs, Germans or Hungarians, depending on the events of each period and specific historical circumstances. In Serbian, the village is called *Ečka* (Ечка); in Romanian, *Ecica* or *Ecica Română*; in German, *Deutsch-Etschka;* and in Hungarian, *Écska*. Overthe last 100 years, the size of the village population has remained relatively stable, with a minimum of 3,934 inhabitants after WWII in 1948, and a high peak of 5,293 inhabitants in 1981.

According to the last 2011 census, Ečka has a population of 3,999. Serbs make up the largest ethnic group, accounting for more than half of the village population (57.2%), followed by Romanians (27.3%), Hungarians (4.5%) and Roma (2.7%). Bulgarians, Yugoslavs, Croats, Germans, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims, Slovaks, Slovenians and Ukrainians account for 2.1% of the total population, while people of unknown, regional or undeclared ethnicity account for 5.8%.[7]

Legend has it that the village was named after one of the wives or daughters of Attila the Hun, who died where the village is situated (Gazdag, Miron and Novak 2012: 4). The first written documents that attest to the existence of a settlement in the area of present-day Ečka date back to the 15th century, when the area belonged to the Bečej fortress, which was owned at the time by the Serbian Despot Djuradj Branković. Even then, the place was known for its customs house and ferry. The first inhabitants were most probably Hungarians, forced to leave their settlements and retreat further into the north by the constant incursions of the Turks into Hungary (Gazdag, Miron and Novak 2012: 5).

Central to the ethnic and linguistic mosaic of the village is the colonisation of Banat in the 18th century. Previously inhabited by Slovaks, Ečka appears on the Banat maps of 1761 as a Serbian settlement, with a little more than 50 houses (Gazdag, Miron and Novak 2012: 21). Starting in 1765, the village was

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[7] The results of the 2011 census concerning ethnic affiliation by settlement were not released to the public; the data, however, is accessible to researchers upon personal request to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

colonised by Romanians from the Timişoara Banat. Then, in 1767, a larger group of Romanians from Transylvania arrived (Maluckov 1985: 38). In 1773, the village already had 139 Serbian and Romanian houses (Gazdag, Miron and Novak 2012: 22). Later, in 1787, 110 Hungarian families settled in the village, and in the following year, 1788, several Slovak families arrived (Gazdag, Miron and Novak 2012: 25). Towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, Germans started arriving in Ečka from Western and South-Western Germany. Until the end of WWII, the village was majorly inhabited by Romanians together with Germans, Hungarians, Serbians, Jews and several other ethnicities. After the war, the Jews and most of the Germans disappeared from the ethnic mosaic of Ečka. In the last 20 years, the village has had a Serbian majority population.

The official languages of the Banat region, as well as of Ečka, have changed over time, reflecting the linguistic policies of each period: Latin, German and then, Hungarian, which remained the official language in Banat until the end of WWI. Today, Serbian (with Cyrillic script), Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian are the official languages of the municipality of Zrenjanin, to which Ečka belongs.[8]

Ečka is a relatively big village that surrounds a 19th century castle, Kaštel Ečka. Today, the castle functions as a hotel. The village has an airfield, built in 1942 by the German army as the biggest military airport in the Balkans, three churches (Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, and Catholic)[9] and several prayer houses. Of the village's interesting historical trivia, one might mention the young Emperor Franz Joseph's 1852 visit to Ečka and 9-year-old Franz Liszt's piano concert at Kaštel Ečka.

Data and Methodology

Our study is based on data collected in 2020 and 2021 during six field trips to Ečka: four one-day trips in May, June and July 2020, a three-day trip in August 2020, and a one-day trip in July 2021. We used a digital camera to capture

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[8] See 'Languages and scripts in official use in the status of cities and municipalities on the territory of the Autonomous Province Vojvodina', *http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/mapa.php*, retrieved May 25, 2021.

[9] Ečka's synagogue was destroyed in 1941.

images from the village, and we also conducted participant observation by recording interviews and collecting walking narratives from locals in Serbian or Romanian. The interviews provided qualitative data related to the digital images of the LL of the village.

The digital capturing of public signage in Ečka resulted in more than 300 photographs containing inscriptions in different languages and scripts, which are deposited in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies (DABI) in Belgrade. Out of these, 223 photographs are also archived in the Digital Archive of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (DAIS). The 223 photographs we based our analysis on contain more than 300 tokens, understood in Backhaus' (2006: 55) terms as 'any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame'.

Following previous studies on language policy and language visibility changes in the urban areas of Vojvodina (see Vuković 2012), which yielded evidence of the systematic Serbisation of the public domain, a question arose as to whether the same tendency is encountered in a rural context. The dataset we used was analysed for evidence of sociolinguistic reconfiguration, preference of using a particular language or script and absence of specific languages from the RLL.

Unlike in cities, where the study of LL originates, a village, with its reduced number of inscriptions, can be analysed as a whole, and the majority of inscriptions can be taken into account to draw pertinent conclusions on the general state of language(s), prestige and the relations of power between them. In the present paper, we use a mixed approach, with preference given to the qualitative method.

Analysis and Discussion

The LL of any region is closely related to its language policy. The official, *top-down* inscriptions generally follow the official language policy, and in multilingual settings with several official languages and scripts, they usually contain all of them. On the other hand, the private, *bottom-up* signs reflect the linguistic identity or preference of the individuals or businesses that place them (Gorter 2006). However, this typology, made to fit urban areas, cannot be precisely replicated and applied to the rural area of Banat, nor can its

application yield relevant results. Even if all traditional LL signage is present in the Banat village, the border between top-down and bottom-up, governmental and private is not as clear-cut as in the cities, and one can notice the frequent infiltration of private initiatives into what are supposed to be official inscriptions. Likewise, the two basic functions of the linguistic landscape, informational and symbolic, are also blurred in the rural area of Banat (see below). Last but not least, the occurrence and spatial distribution of languages and scripts differ from those in the urban LL, the most notable difference being the absence of English.

As Sikimić and Nomachi (2016: 14) pointed out, top-down inscriptions in the rural areas of Serbia are very rare. They include street names, the name of the settlement as a road sign (marking the entrance and exit from the settlement) and official inscriptions on the buildings where local bodies or institutions reside, such as the town hall, the local administration and the school. The language of these inscriptions is regulated at a local level depending on the ethnic composition of the population.

According to the local regulations of public language use, the official inscriptions in Ečka, set by the city's governing bodies or institutions founded by the municipality of Zrenjanin, should contain the four languages in use in the municipality: Serbian (Cyrillic), Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak. However, the rule is not obeyed in all cases: sometimes, the order of the languages differ and at other times, the number.

As for the bottom-up inscriptions present in rural areas, the largest corpus can be found on tombstones in the local cemeteries, which, located at the edge of the villages, are an integral part of them, as they are regularly visited. The degree of the visibility of minority languages in the multinational rural communities of Banat, as well as their use, endangerment and social status, can be best seen in the local cemetery (Sikimić & Nomachi 2016: 10). Thus, the local cemetery functions as a palimpsest: a chronicle of the village.

Taking these points into account, we suggested a change of perspective. We advocated for analysing the Banat village from a two-fold perspective: on the one hand, we looked at the village proper, with its share of inscriptions dictated by the current official language policies, present use of languages and language prestige, which form the *synchronic LL* of the village, and on the other hand, we analysed the inscriptions which preserve the reflection of the past use of languages, personal or official, which form the *memorial LL* of the village. The

synchronic LL of the village is much more dynamic and changes with greater speed, while the memorial LL is much more resistant to changes. While the inscriptions in the synchronic LL are largely comprised of ephemeral signs, the inscriptions in the memorial LL are usually carved or engraved in stone, made to last. If, with the change of the official language policy, the official plates are simply taken away and replaced with others in a different language, an effort is put into the preservation of the inscriptions in the memorial LL, regardless of the change of languages. Last but not least, the inscriptions that form the synchronic LL are not dated, while those that make up the memorial LL are almost always dated, as their main function is to be the reflection of a particular time.

In the next section, we present the data collected in Ečka against the background of the suggested typology.

The Synchronic LL

The synchronic LL of the village comprises different top-down and bottom-up inscriptions, which reflect the actual state of languages, use of languages and language policy at the municipal and state level. It includes street names, the name of the settlement as a road sign, official inscriptions on the buildings where local bodies or institutions reside, different commercial inscriptions, obituaries and graffiti.

Street names

Ečka has 30 streets, which began to be named in 1936.[10] Unlike in other multilingual Banat settlements, the street names in Ečka are not bilingual or multilingual, but written in Serbian with the Latin script. However, two of them have Romanian names: *Unirea* (Unity) and *Libertatea* (Liberty). As far as street

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10 The streets of Ečka are: Aerodromska, Banatska, Banjalučka, Begejska, Beogradska, Bosanska, Brodska, Dunavska, Jamure, Kosovska, Kumanovska, Libertatea, Lička, Ljubljan- ska, Lukićevski put, Makedonska, Maršala Tita, Novosadska, Pupinova, Radnička, Ribarska, Školska, Somborska, Sportska, Titelska, Unirea, Vinogradska, Vojvođanska, Zagrebačka and Zrenjaninska (see https://www.planplus.rs/zrenjanin/ecka/ulice, retrieved on May 11, 2021).

names are concerned, which in urban settings are considered top-down signs, in Ečka, some of the street name plates were placed by the local authorities, but some also appear on private houses, together with the number of the house and the name of the owner, and these were placed by the owners.

In the latter case, one can notice different spellings of the two streets with Romanian names (for example, *Unirea* and *Unirja*), which might be an indication of the fact that either the owner of the house that placed the name plate is not Romanian, or that they do not follow the standard Romanian orthography conventions.

Name of the village

On the side of the road, at the entrance to and exit from Ečka, the name of the village is written in Serbian (in both Cyrillic and Latin scripts) and Romanian: *Ечка, Ečka* and *Ecica*. This reflects the composition of the population in the village, as according to The Law of the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities,[11] if a minority makes up more than 15% of the population, it has the right to have the settlement name written in its respective language. A new law, which was passed in 2020, stipulates that all languages that are official at the municipal level have to be placed on all the village's name plates from the respective municipality, but this new law has not been implemented yet.

However, in many multilingual settlements of Banat, the inscriptions in languages other than Serbian, or even those in Latin script in general, are often scratched onto or painted over the name plate; Ečka is no exception (Image 1).

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[11] Art. 11, http://antidiskriminacija.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-prava-i-slododa-nacionalnih-manjina.pdf. See also Art. 8 of the Decision on the Closer Arrangement of Various Issues of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities on the Territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina: http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/odluke/Odluka_sluzbene_jezika.pdf, retrieved on May 26, 2021.

Image 1. The name of the village written in Serbian (Cyrillic and Latin script) and Romanian. https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_11098

Names of local institutions

Our analysis took into account six photographs of signage that contained the names of institutions with an official character: the post office, the town hall, the society of volunteer fire-fighters, the local council of pensioners, the cultural centre and the health centre (Image 2). Out of the six photographs, four contained all four official languages. However, the scripts and order of the languages differ slightly: two had the names of the institutions written in Serbian Cyrillic, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak; one in Serbian Cyrillic, Romanian, Hungarian and Slovak; and one in Serbian Latin, Romanian, Hungarian and Slovak. Two of the photographed signs were bilingual: one was in Serbian Latin and Romanian, and the other was in Serbian Cyrillic and Romanian.

When analysing the LL of Subotica, Vuković (2012: 170) noted that the order of languages on the inscriptions placed by the local authorities mirrored the status and relative political power of the ethno-linguistic communities. However, the order of languages in such cases apparently has a more pragmatic reason, also mentioned in a footnote by Vuković: after Serbian, which, as the state language, always comes first, the order of minority languages is determined by the order of the letters in the Cyrillic alphabet.[12]

Image 2. The village health centre. The inscription is in the four official languages: Serbian (Cyrillic script), Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_11147

Commercial inscriptions

In the larger rural settlements of Banat, one can encounter commercial inscriptions on local shops, restaurants and cafes. In Ečka, aside from the latter, we also came across different types of ephemeral advertisements printed on

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[12] In the case of Subotica, it was observed that the order of minority languages on official inscriptions was sometimes different from the expected and codified order, that is, trilingual inscriptions were frequently reduced to bilingual or even monolingual inscriptions (Vuković 2012: 171).

paper and stuck or glued in different places: on the improvised information board in the centre of the village, the poles of the bus stops, shop windows, fences, trees, poles or the walls of houses (Image 3).

Image 3. Commercial inscription in Serbian (Latin script) glued on a tree. https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_11005

Differing from the official inscriptions, the private inscriptions in Ečka were written exclusively in Serbian, most of the time in the Latin script. Vuković (2012: 174) noticed the same dominance of Serbian written in the Latin script in Subotica, which he attributed to the fact that the Latin script is generally perceived as more inclusive and therefore, more suitable for written communication in a multinational and multi-ethnic environment. This is also in line with the study on the usage of scripts and the attitudes towards them in Novi Sad (Stepanov, Zorica & Lovre 2011). It was found that the Latin script was perceived as an expression of a multi-ethnic environment, while Cyrillic was associated with nationally connoted (that is, negative) content (Stepanov, Zorica & Lovre 2011: 419).

Obituaries

In all regions of Serbia, it is common to place obituaries (notices of people's deaths) on information boards, on the house or gate of the deceased and on poles or at the entrance of the cemetery. The obituaries are printed on paper and contain information about the age of the deceased and their family, the time and place of burial; regardless of religion, this is commonly done (see Sikimić & Nomachi 2016: 15.). These private inscriptions are usually in Serbian, but they can also be printed in the languages of national minorities. They are part of the ephemeral LL as they quickly deteriorate due to atmospheric conditions.

All the obituaries photographed in Ečka were written in Serbian, in both Cyrillic and Latin scripts. This most probably depends on the local funeral service agencies, which may or may not offer the printing of obituaries in other languages, in this case, Romanian.

Graffiti

Defining the functions of graffiti within the framework of LLs, Pennycook (2010: 142) highlighted its social functions, such as the creation of identity and resistance to existing official discourses, while also pointing out the com-

Image 4. Graffiti in Serbian (Latin script) on a house. https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_10993

plexity of graffiti, which incorporates the aspect of art. Generally, it can be said that graffiti 'is assigned a communicative function and is typical of an urban environment which presumes it is an integral part of a linguistic landscape' (Radavičiūtė 2017: 83).

Although not at all characteristic to the rural area, today, more and more Serbian villages are host to murals and graffiti. In Ečka, we photographed 12 pieces of graffiti, all in Serbian and written in the Latin script. Out of the 12, eight contained messages referring to the local autonomy of the province: *Vojvodina republika* (Vojvodina republic, see Image 4); *Vojvodina država* (Vojvodina state); *Kiša pada, Srbija propada* (Rain is falling, Serbia is rotting); *Srbija propada* (Serbia is rotting; and *Nezavisna država Vojvodina* (Independent state of Vojvodina).

Tourist boards and signs

Even though the tourist boards and signs in cities are usually placed by official authorities or tourism organisations and are generally in English or other international languages, in Ečka, the few tourist boards located at the village's important crossroads were placed by a private individual and are written in Serbian in the Latin script.

The Memorial LL

The memorial LL of the village is made up of inscriptions of a more permanent character, which, in contrast to the ones in the synchronic LL, are fit for a diachronic analysis, as they are usually precisely dated. Among these inscriptions, we mention those on old, traditional Vojvodina houses, monuments and statues as well as epitaphs and other inscriptions on the tombstones in the local cemeteries.

Inscriptions on old houses

The traditional Swabian or Vojvodina house, which can still be found both in the Serbian and Romanian Banat, or the Vojvodina-Pannonian house, is a characteristic type of house that appeared in this region at the end of the 18th century. A Swabian house is recognisable by the gable, a triangular portion

of the façade under the roof which is usually decorated with the symbol of an eye, moon or sun. However, apart from these symbols, the initials or the name of the owner, as well as the year of the last renovation, are also inscribed on the gable.

Nowadays in Ečka, these old houses are rare and no effort is put into preserving them. We photographed five such houses. Two had only the year written on the gable: *1928* and *1942*; while three had the year and the owner's name: *Lazar Miok 1906, Ioan Petrascu 1923* (see Image 5) and *Magda Ion Anul – 1972*. It must benoted that all the names are Romanian.

Image 5. Year and name of the owner on the front side of the house. https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_11086

Inscriptions on monuments

In Ečka more than in other Banat villages, a number of monuments from different periods of time can be seen. Several are in the yard of Kastel Ečka, while others are in the village proper. The inscriptions on the monuments are in Latin, German and Serbian, as follows: Latin inscription on an 1815 monument in the yard of the castle; German inscription on an 1891 monument in the same place; Serbian Cyrillic inscription on a memorial dedicated to the

Image 6. Inscription in Latin on a 1912 monument in the centre of the village. https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_11169

fallen Red Army fighters that fought against fascism in the centre of the village; and another one in Latin on a 1912 monument (Image 6).

Epitaphs and inscriptions on tombstones

As researchers have already mentioned, in the rural settlements of Banat, thebiggest number of inscriptions are to be found in the local cemeteries. The inscriptions and epitaphs on tombstones represent a corpus that can be used 'for a dynamic perspective of LL, since each funeral monument contains the exact year of origin (*terminus antequem*), and in some cases the exact date' (Sikimić and Nomachi 2016: 11).

In the context of multilingual communities, tombstone inscriptions are also 'indicators of linguistic prestige, change and death of language' (VanDam

2008: 31). Depending on the language used, the inscriptions address members of a particular linguistic (and ethnic) community.

Ečka has two cemeteries: Catholic and Orthodox. The Catholic cemetery is older, with tombstones dating from the 18th century and inscriptions in Latin, Hungarian, German and Serbian. The inscription on the monumental gate at the entrance to the cemetery reads: *Ma Th Ort der Ruhe 1935 Fr Jo* ('Maria Theresa Place of Silence 1935 Franz Joseph').

The Orthodox cemetery is newer and bigger, and contains inscriptions in Romanian, Serbian, and Bulgarian, as the overwhelming majority of the Serbs and Romanians in the village are Orthodox Christians. The oldest tombstones date from the beginning of the 20th century. In contrast to those in the Catholic cemetery, the tombstones in the Orthodox cemetery often display long epitaphs containing emotional thoughts on life, verses or details about the life of the deceased or those left behind (Image 7).

Image 7. Inscription in Romanian on a tombstone in the Christian Orthodox cemetery. https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_dais_11118

Unlike in Western Europe, where minimal markings on monuments prevail as a sign of self-preservation that characterises the Catholic and Lutheran traditions, the Orthodox epitaphs of Eastern Europe can be very long, complex and inventive. In Ivan Čolović's (1983: 11) collection of new Serbian epitaphs from the second half of the 20th century, *Literature in the Graveyard*, he notes that 'in environments where social communication includes public verbal, and especially written, expression of personal emotions, turning an abbreviated tombstone inscription into an extended epitaphis a procedure that confirms belonging to the environment'. Čolović (1983: 10) believes that this renewed custom is a means of emphasising the deceased's reputation among the members of the community and that it is becoming a mass trend. In his opinion, the main reason for placing epitaphs on tombstones is 'the existence of a pattern of social communication on our soil, which not only allows but also recommends public verbal expression of emotions, and not only in connection with death' (Čolović 1983: 10).

Conclusion

Our study aimed to contribute to the growing body of RLL research by advancing both theoretical and methodological frameworks. We claimed that changing the focus of the study of LLs from urban to rural areas offers an alternative view on multilingualism, since rural and urban cultures in most regions of the world use signage differently. Apart from top-down signs, which echo official language policy in urban and rural areas equally, multilingualism in villages is multi-layered, since it is visible not simply from a synchronic perspective but especially from a diachronic perspective within the memorial LL that contains more durable inscriptions. Although some or many of the languages visible in memorial inscriptions have a more symbolic than communicative function in the present (for example, German), they are still tokens of particular communities that are recognised as distinct ones. Therefore, we can consider multilingualism a relational and scalar feature that requires more fine-grained research methodologies.

Our focus on a particular rural area in the Global East complements the emerging area of RLL studies. It displayed a variety of LL tokens, which demonstrate dynamic social development at the intersection of global (for

example, wars, migrations and economic transformations) and local (for example, traditional multilingual and multireligious cultures influencing the positive self-image of the inhabitants) perspectives.

As we have shown, the village Ečka in rural Banat, with its small number of inscriptions, might prove fit for a change of perspective in the study of LLs. In such an RLL, one does not have to focus on a particular street or on parts of a street. Instead, one can easily analyse the signage found in the entire village. Thus, the smaller number of inscriptions might prove to be an advantage, not a drawback.

As expected, the classical typologies developed for the LL of cities cannot yield significant results if applied to rural areas. For this reason, we suggested using a different typology for Banat, which we suggest be extended to the analysis of the RLLs of the Global East. Therefore, instead of the classical top-down and bottom-up distinction, we proposed seeing the village space from a two-fold perspective: the synchronic LL, which mirrors the current use of languages, language prestige and language policies, and the memorial LL, which is a chronicle of the multilingualism of past generations and welcomes a diachronic perspective of LLs. However, adopting such a perspective in urban areas is not possible due to the greater number of inscriptions and the fact that the cemeteries are not usually part of the city proper.

Previous studies on language policy and language visibility changes in urban areas of Vojvodina produced evidence of the systematic Serbisation of the public domain, which prompted us to see whether the same tendency can be found in a rural context. Our study confirmed that there is a gap between the official multiculturalism and multilingualism policy as declared and implemented by top-down agents and the gradual transition to mono-lingualism and monoscriptalism at the bottom-up level. In other words, using the typology we implemented, we found that the memorial LL of the village is multilingual, while the synchronic LL mirrors the multilingual policy but reflects the village's gradual transition to monolingualism. The level of this monolingualisation must be the focus of further studies within RLLs in the Banat region.

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