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GAME THEORETIC EVALUATION OF PLANNING ROMA LANGUAGES IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

The Roma population in Hungary has endured longstanding cultural and linguistic discrimination, despite their significant numbers. As a result, the outlook for maintaining and preserving the use of the Romany language in Hungary is bleak. In an attempt to shed light on this issue, this paper discusses the current situation of the Romany language in Hungary, and subsequently, investigates the possible implementation and effectiveness of various language policies through the lens of the Game Theory.

1.0 Introduction

The Roma, often derogatively referred to as Gypsies, constitute the largest minority in Europe (Roach, 2007). They are particularly prevalent in Eastern European nations, such as Hungary, wherein the Roma are estimated to number between 520,000 and 600,000, comprising roughly five to seven percent of the total population (Forray & Balázsovics, 2008). This demographic, which ranks as the fourth largest concentration of Roma in Europe, is projected to increase exponentially over the next several decades (Bureau of National and Ethnic Minorities, 2005). Yet, despite their numbers, the Roma largely reside on the peripheries of Hungarian society, and generally endure severe social, educational, and linguistic discrimination. The following image provides an overview of the geographic distribution of the Roma in Hungary.
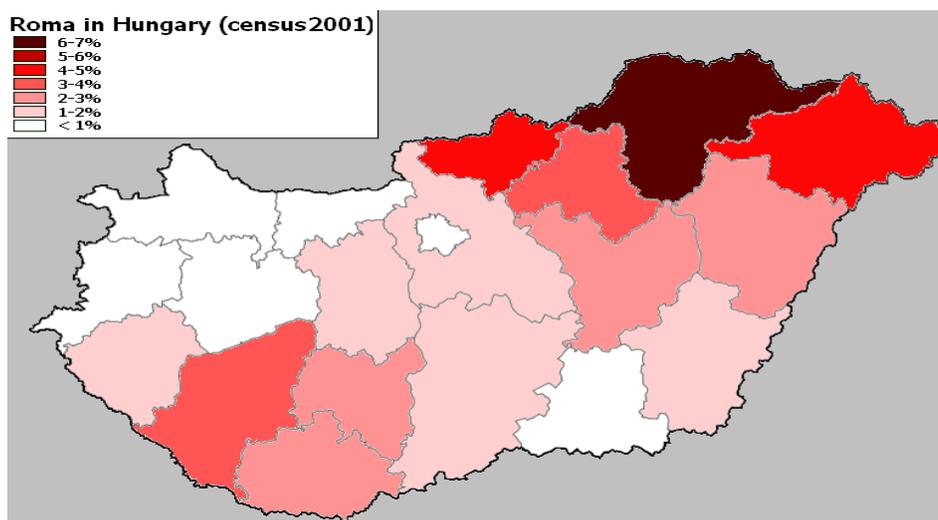

Figure 1: Distribution of Hungarian Roma (GeoCurrents, 2012).

In recent years, awareness of the longstanding discrimination against the Roma has increased, causing the issue to move to the forefront of human rights campaigns in Hungary and throughout Europe (Roach, 2007). Roma activists have begun fighting for

equal access to health care, education, jobs, housing, and government services (Roach, 2007). Moreover, some activists, particularly linguists, are advocating that Romani be taught in Hungarian schools, in an effort to foster the language and culture of the Roma people. To implement such a policy, language planners must recognize the impediments to teaching Romani in Hungary, and consider the positions of each of the individuals involved in the process. This will enable language planners to determine what type of language policy has the most potential for success.

2.0 The Status of the Roma in Hungary

To determine the most appropriate language policy for teaching Romani, it is necessary to first discuss the present state of the Hungarian Roma. Based on sociolinguistic surveys, the Hungarian Roma can be classified into three groups. First, there are the Romungro, who typically speak Hungarian. In addition, there are the Vlach, who speak Hungarian and Romani, and finally, there are the Beas, who speak Hungarian and an archaic dialect of Romanian (Lakatos, 2008).

For centuries, the Roma have been significantly disadvantaged in regard to both their status within society and their access to quality education. Hungarian Roma typically face difficulties obtaining employment due to systematic discrimination. Furthermore, the Roma are far less educated than the Hungarian majority (Roach, 2007). Due to both internal pressures and external discrimination, the majority of Hungarian Roma are not educated past the primary level. Roma students are also heavily overrepresented in special education schools in Hungary, which are intended for students with mental or physical disabilities. As a result of these discriminative practices, many Hungarian schools tend to be segregated (Aranka, 2008). Therefore, it is apparent that the current strategies of segregation and assimilation have only instigated further adversities for the Roma and reinforced their separation from Hungarian society.

Due to this longstanding discrimination, the majority of Roma have assimilated linguistically, and adopted Hungarian as their native language (Pálmainé, 2008). The cause of this trend is highlighted by Pálmainé (2008) in the following quote: "[b]eing a Gypsy is of low prestige for a certain part of society due to the fixed prejudices that dominated during the centuries. The majority of Gypsies declare themselves as belonging to the majority population and usually adopt the language of the host country" (p. 21). This process was further accelerated by policies implemented by the Hungarian government which "forced an assimilation of the minorities." Despite this tendency toward assimilation, sociolinguistic research has indicated that a number of Hungarian Roma have maintained proficiency in Romani (Pálmainé, 2008). In addition, other Roma who do not speak their mother tongue have expressed interest in learning.

3.0 Current Approaches to Teaching Roma Languages: Policies and Impediments

Though Hungarian Roma have the right to demand education in their mother tongue, the reality is that "language education in Gypsy languages lacks in essential conditions, both in terms of personnel and material resources" (Pálmainé, 2008). Essentially, a limited number of teachers are proficient in Romani, and there is a general lack of educational resources such as textbooks, dictionaries, and teaching materials

available. Furthermore, due to widespread prejudices, most Hungarians do not place a high priority on teaching Romani, especially since it would inevitably demand further funding from the already struggling Hungarian government.

Consequently, Romani is rarely taught in Hungarian schools. Nearly two decades ago, the Ghandi Secondary School became the first school to teach Beas and Romani, the most prevalent languages among the Hungarian Roma (Pálmainé, 2008). Until that time, the teaching of Romani was nonexistent in both primary and secondary schools (Pálmainé, 2008). Furthermore, several Hungarian universities offer courses about the language and culture of the Roma. Notably, the University of Pécs has a comprehensive program in the field of Romology (Forray, 2008). Essentially, Romani has only recently been added to the Hungarian education system, and has yet to become pervasive, or even adequately resourced.

4.0 The Game Theory and Language Planning
Koffi (2012) suggests that linguists undergo a dynamic shift in their approach to language planning. More specifically, Koffi claims that the Game Theory, developed by de Mesquita (2009), can be applied to language planning in an effort to ascertain the potential success or failure of proposed language policies. The Game Theory utilizes the Predictioneer's Model, proposed by de Mesquita (2009), to calculate the most likely outcome for the given language game. This theory relies on the following formula:

$$\text{Weighted Mean} = \frac{I \times S \times P}{I \times S}$$

This formula first requires identification of the players involved in the Roma language game in Hungary. Subsequently, the influence (I), salience (S), and position (P) of each of these players will be determined. The ensuing sections will apply this theory to language planning for Romani in Hungary.

5.0 The Game Theory and Roma Language Planning in Hungary
The preceding research regarding teaching Romani in Hungary highlights a number of players involved in this language game. The following table lists each of the players in the order of their influence.

No.	Players	Influence
1	European Union (EU)	100
2	Hungarian Ministry of Education	100
3	Hungarian politicians	90
4	European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)	80
5	Linguists	80
6	Hungarian Education Administration	80
7	Hungarian parents	80
8	Hungarian teachers	70
9	European expatriates	70
10	Elite Roma (e.g., artists and musicians)	60

11	Educated Roma	60
12	Roma politicians	60
13	Roma language teachers	50
14	Roma parents (assimilated)	40
15	Roma government leaders	30
16	Roma parents (non-assimilated)	20
17	Other minorities	10
18	Hungarian students	10
19	Roma students (assimilated)	0
20	Roma students (non-assimilated)	0
21	Poor, uneducated Roma	0

Table 1: Identification of the Players and their Influence

The players with the greatest degree of influence, namely the European Union, Hungarian Ministry of Education, and Hungarian politicians, possess the highest degree of political power, and as a result, have the most significant impact on the development of minority education policies in Hungary. The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) and linguists also have fairly substantial influence, due to their strong presence in the fight for Roma rights. Likewise, Hungarian parents, teachers, and educational administration and staff are directly involved in the education of Hungarian students; thus, they have vested interest in the outcome of this language game. Due to their low status in Hungarian society, Roma players tend to possess significantly less influence, which varies by their level of education. Roma parents and students were further categorized as either assimilated or non-assimilated, to indicate whether they have retained their Roma culture, or have integrated into Hungarian society both culturally and linguistically.

The players in this game were each assigned a position regarding their stance on teaching Romani in Hungarian schools. The following table describes each of the positions held by the players in this language game.

Position Scale Matrix	Position Matrix
Teach Roma languages as subjects in Hungarian colleges and universities	99
Teach Roma languages as foreign languages in Hungarian secondary schools	66
Teach Roma languages as subjects in Hungarian primary schools (i.e., 1-2 hours per week)	33
Do not teach Roma languages in Hungarian schools	0

Table 2: Positions in the Romani Language Game

The potential salience of each of the players was also identified. In this analysis, salience is interpreted as the level of interest of each of the players in regard to teaching Romani in Hungarian schools (Koffi, 2012). The following table provides an overview of the varying degrees of salience.

Salience Scale Matrix	Salience Matrix
High interest in teaching Roma languages	95
Moderate interest in teaching Roma languages	75
Average interest in teaching Roma languages	50
Low interest in teaching Roma languages	25
No interest in teaching Roma languages	10

Table 3: Levels of Salience in the Romani Language Game

Koffi (2012) claims that players in a language game do not generally hold a view that is completely devoted to one side of a given issue. Thus, the salience scale ranges from 10, which indicates no interest in teaching Roma languages, to 95, which indicates a high interest in teaching Roma languages. This leaves room for any subtle doubts that players may have regarding their positions on Romani language in education policies in Hungary.

Using the weighted mean formula, the preferred language policy for Romani in Hungary was calculated. The following table outlines the influence, salience, and position of each of the players involved, in addition to the outcome determined by the weighted mean analysis.

No.	Players	Influence	Salience	Position	I x S x P	I x S
1	European Union (EU)	100	50	33	165,000	5,000
2	Hungarian Ministry of Education	100	10	0	0	1,000
3	Hungarian politicians	90	10	0	0	900
4	European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)	80	95	33	250,800	7,600
5	Linguists	80	95	66	501,600	7,600
6	Hungarian Education Administration	80	10	0	0	800
7	Hungarian parents	80	10	0	0	800
8	Hungarian teachers	70	25	33	57,750	1,750
9	Hungarian Education	70	10	0	0	700

	Staff Members					
10	European expatriates	70	10	0	0	700
11	Elite Roma (e.g., artists and musicians)	60	75	33	148,500	4,500
12	Educated Roma	60	95	99	564,300	5,700
13	Roma politicians	60	50	33	99,000	3,000
14	Roma teachers	50	95	33	156,750	4,750
15	Roma parents (assimilated)	40	10	0	0	400
16	Roma government leaders	30	75	33	74,250	2,250
17	Roma parents (non-assimilated)	20	95	33	62,700	1,900
18	Other minorities	10	10	0	0	100
19	Hungarian students	10	10	0	0	100
20	Roma students (assimilated)	0	10	0	0	0
21	Roma students (non-assimilated)	0	50	33	0	0
22	Poor, uneducated Roma	0	75	33	0	0
Totals					2,080,650	49,550
Weighted Mean					41.99%	

Table 4: Weighted Mean Calculation

6.0 Game Theory: Results and Implications

Koffi (2012) asserts that the position closest to the weighted mean is the language policy that is most agreeable to all players. Thus, the score of 41.99% indicates that the preferred policy is to teach Roma languages in Hungarian primary schools. This policy seems to be the most appropriate given that the majority of Roma students do not continue their education beyond the primary level (Aranka, 2008). Therefore, if Roma languages were taught exclusively at either the secondary or university level, most Roma students would not have the opportunity to learn their heritage language.

This reality significantly influenced the positions of a number of players involved in this language game. Arguably, the majority of the players interested in teaching Roma languages may tend to support their integration into primary schools, as it would be the only means of reaching a high number of Roma students. Thus, players such as the ERRC, EU, elite Roma, and Roma teachers, politicians, and government leaders were assigned the position of teaching Roma dialects in primary schools. Due to varying views

held by Roma parents, they were categorized as being either assimilated or non-assimilated. Roma parents who have assimilated generally do not have a high interest in their language due to societal prejudices and stigma, whereas other Roma parents maintain their native culture and language, and embrace their heritage (Forray & Balázsovics, 2008).

Though many players were deemed to support teaching Roma dialects in Hungarian primary schools, a number of players were assigned varying positions. Linguists may potentially support teaching Roma dialects at a secondary level, as Hungarian universities have contributed to such initiatives in the past. Interestingly, highly-educated Roma may potentially support teaching Roma dialects at the university level, as the number of Roma intellectuals interested in learning Roma languages has risen in recent years (Pálmainé, 2008). Pálmainé (2008) highlights this by stating that, "there is an increasing interest in the re-acquisition of the language among Gypsy intellectuals, in spite of their former intention to assimilate and melt into the majority population" (p. 32).

Predictably, the majority of the Hungarian and non-Roma players do not indicate an interest in teaching Roma dialects. This is largely due to longstanding discrimination against the Roma, in addition to negative stereotypes that have been reinforced by the majority throughout history.

7.0 Conclusion
Implementing a language in education policy for the Roma in Hungary would pose a number of challenges. Naturally, such a policy would first require significant funding from the Hungarian government, and possibly the European Union. Unfortunately, the Hungarian economy has struggled in recent years, due to a weakened currency, limiting the funds available for such endeavors. Furthermore, there is a need for additional corpus and acquisition planning. Due to the late standardization of Roma languages and the variations between dialects, there are insufficient teaching materials such as dictionaries and textbooks. Moreover, additional teachers would need to be trained in Beas and Romani, the most prevalent Roma dialects in Hungary.

Despite the costs, teaching Roma dialects in Hungary would encourage language preservation, and possible increase the marketability of the languages. Pálmainé (2008) highlights this by stating that, "acquisition of knowledge in schools, then, would explicitly trigger an increase in the prestige of the Beas languages, and it would result in—most importantly—a replacement of language transmission back to families" (p. 28). Furthermore, such a policy could potentially create additional employment opportunities for the Roma, as there would inevitably be a greater need for Roma speakers to develop educational materials.

Unfortunately, considering the intolerance and discrimination against the Roma that is currently ramped throughout much of Hungary, the possibility of implementing a Roma language in education policy seems bleak. That being said, pressure from the European and other international entities has increased in recent years, which raises hope

that Hungary may still begin to amend their policies regarding ethnic and linguistic minorities, particularly the Roma.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Kristen Lorincz is a recent graduate of the MA TESL/Applied Linguistics program at SCSU and is currently completing the requirements necessary to obtain a K-12 teaching license in ESL. She earned a BA in history from the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN. In the future, she plans to teach a variety of age levels in both the United States and abroad for several years and then pursue a doctoral degree in a related field.

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