PROLang Hybrid Seminar on

Endangered and Minoritised Languages of Eastern and Southeastern Europe

7th May 2024

**ABSTRACTS**

(in the order of talks)

**Linguistic Fieldwork**, **Language Documentation, and Endangered Languages**

**Radu Voica**, UCL-SSEES and SOAS, University of London

**Chris Moseley**, UCL-SSEES

It is a well-established fact that fieldwork is a crucial component of natural sciences (*e.g.* botany, zoology, geology) and of some human disciplines such as anthropology and ethnography. This talk will show that the same is true for linguistics, and will briefly describe how linguists approached fieldwork in the past and how it is done nowadays, with particular reference to the documentation of endangered languages and efforts of language maintenance and reclamation. The second part will introduce to the public The Foundation for Endangered Languages, the Encyclopedia of the World’s Endangered Languages and the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger.

**Meänkieli** (Finno-Ugric), N Sweden

**Riitta Valijarvi**, UCL-SSEES and Uppsala University

Meänkieli is a endangered and minoritised Finno-Ugric language with 20,000-40,000 speakers in northern Sweden. It is closely related to Finnish and Kven. Meänkieli is one of the five national minority languages in Sweden and has recently received state support, for example, in the form of language revitalisation centres. It is characterised by a great deal of (regional, intergenerational, situational, free) variation, which is a challenge for grammar-writing and revitalisation efforts. This brief presentation provides an overview of the demographic and sociolinguistic situation of Meänkieli, and discusses cultural activism and recent projects set up to support the language, including language technology and standardisation.

**Romani** (Indo-Aryan) **in Central and Southeastern Europe**

**Eszter Tarsoly**, University College London and Károli Gáspár University, Budapest

Romani (řomani čhib ‘Romani language’, řomanes ‘in a Romani way’) is the only Indo-Aryan language spoken exclusively in Europe (apart from migrant populations elsewhere in the world) by approximately 3.5 million people (census figures and statistics are particularly unreliable). It shows Balkan convergence features, especially Greek influences. Although not endangered overall, it is minoritised in all national and regional contexts where it forms part of speakers’ repertoires, with all its speakers being bi- or multilingual. According to the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages Romani is a „non-territorial language” and enjoys a degree of protection in most places where it is used, althoug this is often minimal or difficult to implement. Romani is a primarily oral language which became a written medium of periodicals, textbooks, and internet sites only a few decades ago (in the 1980s and 1990s). Standardisation efforts targeted individual regional dialects, often within the confines of particular nations states. CEFR-supported language examination is available for some varieties of Romani. Speakers of Romani face ethnic and racio-linguistic stigmatisation in most contexts, with consequences for the language’s status in education and public life; it remains the language of intra-group interactions, restricted to private domains. Paradoxically, this contributed to its maintenance. Groupism-based approaches and standardisation remain problematic – in education and beyond. This presentation reviews some of these concerns while providing a sampler of recent approaches which offer alternatives to standardisation in the maintenance of Romani speakers’ multilingual repertoire.

**Arbëresh** (Albanian-related), **S Italy**

**Martin Di Maggio**, Cadèmia Siciliana

Martin will speak about how language ideologies impact the maintenance and vitality of the Arbëresh language in Sicily. The communities of Piana degli Albanesi and Santa Cristina Gela near Palermo (Sicily) speak two mutually intelligible varieties of the Arbëresh language, and the population is descended not only from Albanian speakers but also from local Sicilians who settled in the villages and intermarried. Yet non-Albanian derived features of Arbëresh speech are viewed by some academics and activists as unhealthy code-mixing or code-switching and the result of attrition, with educational materials and language landscaping reflecting this ideology.

**The** **Eastern Romance Continuum** **and What Is Left of It**

**Radu Voica**, UCL-SSEES and SOAS, University of London

The Eastern Romance languages are more closely related to each other than to any other Romance lect. Although they have been separated for a long time, both linguistically and geographically, obvious shared innovations suggest that contact between the ancestors of their speakers must have existed at some point. It has been proposed by different scholars that contact took place on restricted territories, either N or S of the Danube, and that the current distribution can be explained by mass migrations. The hypothesis advanced in this paper does not exclude certain population movements, but suggests that the Eastern Romance Continuum stretched initially from the N Carpathians to the S Pindus, with a perpendicular axis along Via Egnatia, and the current Romance enclaves in the Balkans are mainly the result of the coexistence in the area with non-Romance-speaking groups, rather than massive displacements of Romance-speakers.

**Istro-Romanian** (E Romance)

**Martin Maiden**, University of Oxford

This paper will briefly outline the origins and history of the 'Istro-Romanian' (Vlåški and Žejånski) speaking community, focusing particularly on the little-described developments over the past 80 years, including the international diaspora. I will also describe recent work on the description and documentation of the language, including our own project in Oxford aimed at writing the history of the language.

**Megleno-Romanian** (Eastern Romance), **Greece, N Macedonia, Serbia, Romania**

**Thede Kahl**, University of Jena

The Meglen Vlachs are characterized by their dispersion over several countries – Greece, N Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Turkey – and by the lack ofcontact between these groups. Most Meglen Vlachs live in the Meglen (Gr.Almopía) region of northern Greece. The close kinship of Meglen Vlach with (Daco-)Romanian makes it hard for the Meglen Vlachs in Romania to preserve both language variants. The Meglen Vlach language and identity are today best preserved in Gevgelija (N Macedonia) and Archangelos (Greece). The preservation of Meglen Vlach in Turkey might come as a surprise, but Turkish became the customary language only after their immigration to Turkey. The Meglen Vlach ethnic consciousness is minimal, however, the degree of language conservation is very high in many communities.

**Endangered and Invisible: Aromanian in-between languages, cultures, and identities** (E Romance), SE Europe

**Dimitra Gkitsa**, University of Southampton

In 1774, the researcher Johann Thumann stated that, at that point in history, no other population in any part of the world was as unknown to West Europeans as the Vlachs (quoted in Kristo, 2014). More than 200 years later, and despite its rich history and the initial populations who used to speak the language, Aromanian remains largely invisible and under-represented. At the same time, the limited language transmission to younger generations, the lack of formal recognition, the many varieties of the spoken language, the negative stereotyping, as well as the shifting national identities of the Aromanian population are all elements that have brought the language on the brink of endangerment. Reviewing recent data and drawing from empirical observations, this paper examines the critical ways in which culture, as well as issues related to collective identity, have shaped the current state of Aromanian (Vlach) language in Albania and Greece. To this end, the paper argues that the cultural assimilation of the Aromanian population in larger distinct cultures have played a crucial role in the gradual decline of the Aromanian-speaking population.

**Macedonian** (S Slavic), **North Macedonia, Greece and Albania**

**Ana Ilievska Zavrsnik**, UCL-SSEES  
This presentation navigates the multifaceted realm of the Macedonian language, examining its socio-linguistic nuances, geographical dispersion, and demographic profiles. Focused on North Macedonia, it explores the language's dynamics within diverse cultural landscapes and historical contexts. Furthermore, it delves into the diaspora communities, particularly in Greece and Albania, unraveling the linguistic heritage and challenges faced by Macedonian speakers beyond their homeland.

**Csángó** (Finno-Ugric), Romania

**Eszter Tarsoly**, University College London and Károli Gáspár University, Budapest

**Arvanitika** (Albanian-related), **Greece**

**Mirela Xhaferaj**, UCL-SSEES

Arvanitika, a variety of the Tosk dialect of Albanian, has been spoken by the Arvanites in Greece for over six centuries. However, today, it faces a precarious situation, being considered an endangered or possibly dying language, with a declining number of fluent speakers, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly shifting towards using Greek exclusively.  In this presentation, we aim to provide a general overview of the current state of Arvanitika, the dedicated linguistic research, and discuss its documentation efforts, including audio recordings, written texts, and lexicographic projects as well as the ongoing efforts for its revitalization and preservation.

**Minority languages in Serbia**

**Jelena Ćalić**, UCL-SSEES and UCL-SELCS

This presentation will give a short overview of the minority languages in Serbia and centres on their treatment in the Serbian educational system. I will look into how policy recommendations and commitments interact with local authorities, language attitudes and ideologies, and finally language education provision. The specific focus will be on the status and treatment of Hungarian in primary and secondary education and the approaches to teaching the intercultural communication in multicultural environments.

**Livonian resurgent** (Finno-Ugric), **Latvia**

**Chris Moseley**, UCL-SSEES

The Livonian language is Finnic, and its closest relative is Estonian. Nowadays the Livonians are a tiny remnant: in the last Latvian census there were 250 people who declared themselves to be of Livonian heritage. Of these people, about twenty can speak the Livonian language, but the number is on the increase again. The death of the language has been predicted over and over again. Twenty-five years ago, when I wrote a thesis about the decline of the language, I too was probably guilty of prematurely predicting its death. In those days there were still people alive who were born into families speaking the language. That generation is gone now, but they left behind an unbroken chain of learners of the language.