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Romani in Ireland: a study of its use, importance, transmission, and speakers' attitudes

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Abstract

Migration has always been a phenomenon across nations worldwide. People moving from one area to another for economic and social reasons have influenced and caused many linguistic changes. Migrants acquire the dominant language of the given country, which can often lead to language attrition and loss with the upbringing of the next generations. The Romani language is an example of how a language can be either preserved or lost depending on the environmental settings, pressures, and perceived attitudes. Historically, as the Roma migrated from India to and across Europe, they acquired linguistic features and customs from local cultures. This study examines the Romani language use, transmission and importance amongst Roma living in Ireland. It explores the changes of language use and transmission of Romani onto the next generations brought up in Ireland. The research investigates the importance the language has amongst the Roma people and their attitudes towards it. The study involved fifty participants of the Roma ethnic background, originally from the Czech Republic and Slovakia who were aged eighteen to sixty-five and over. It employed a mixed method research approach based on questionnaires and qualitative open-ended questions and used convenient sampling. The findings were analysed using descriptive statistical methods and a thematic analysis approach. The research indicates that the use of Romani in Ireland is perceived positively, whereby people have no fear speaking the language in the presence of non-Roma members of the society. However, the language is losing its importance in daily life and is being taken over by the use of English.

Key words: Romani, Romani in Ireland, language transmission, language use, language maintenance, language importance

Introduction

The Roma people and their ethnic language varieties remain an understudied area in linguistic research in Ireland. The number of Roma immigrants to Ireland has significantly increased with the spread of migration from European countries that have entered the European Union in the last two decades. The 2022 Irish Census reported 16,059 individuals identifying as Roma (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2023). This figure represents a

significant increase from earlier estimates, which ranged between 3,000 and 5,000 (Pavee Point, 2018). The Roma people in Ireland are diverse, with some integrating into mainstream society while others form more closed communities. However, accurate statistics on the Roma population remain elusive, largely due to underreporting as many Roma individuals avoid disclosing their ethnicity due to fears of discrimination and stigma linked to systemic prejudice in their countries of origin (Pavee Point). The issue of underreporting is further compounded by migration patterns, particularly from EU countries like Romania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic after their EU accession, where not all migrants identify as Roma out of fear of prejudice (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2020). This highlights the need for culturally sensitive and inclusive data collection methods that can ensure Roma voices are accurately represented while respecting their concerns about discrimination.

In Ireland, Roma face persistent barriers in education, housing, and healthcare, often worsened by language exclusion and the lack of institutional recognition for Romani (Pavee Point, 2018; McGaughey, 2011). Limited interpreting services and cultural mismatches in schools contribute to poor educational outcomes, with Roma children disproportionately placed in special education or leaving school early (Watson et al., 2017). While community and NGO efforts exist, formal state engagement with Romani linguistic rights remains minimal, reinforcing the broader social exclusion of Roma in Irish society.

Within this broader context, the present study turns to the specific experiences of Roma individuals in Ireland. It draws primarily on Bourdieu's (1991) theory of capital, particularly linguistic, cultural, and symbolic capital, as its central theoretical lens. This framework is especially suited to understanding how language practices reflect and reproduce social inequalities. Bourdieu's concepts help frame how language transmission, maintenance,

and attitudes among Roma individuals in Ireland are shaped by broader power dynamics and social hierarchies.

The study focuses on the influence of migration on the Romani language and examines its role among Roma people living in Ireland. It explores three research questions:

1. How often and where do the Roma people speak the Romani language?
2. What are the attitudes towards the Romani language among the Roma community members?
3. What are the motivations of speakers to transmit the Romani language?

Through these questions, the study aims to gain a clearer picture of how Romani is perceived among Roma people in Ireland and to understand any changes in its importance, attitudes toward it, and its likelihood of being passed on to future generations.

Language transmission

While Bourdieu's (1991) concept of cultural capital is central to this study, Family Language Policy (FLP) provides useful insights into the micro-level dynamics of language use within households. The following section briefly introduces these perspectives to support the broader analysis.

Family Language Transmission (FLT) serves as a critical medium for social interaction within families, promoting informal communication between family members (King & Fogle, 2017). In minority language contexts, the intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue is essential for language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). Successful language transmission is based on developing competencies such as receptive and oral skills, socio-pragmatic competence, and biliteracy or biculturality (De Houwer, 2020; Wei, 2022).

Recent research emphasizes the importance of deliberate FLP to navigate societal and global pressures that influence language choices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). Lambert (2008) identifies two key attitudes towards FLP: informed and uninformed. These attitudes shape the implementation of language transmission techniques, with each technique being relevant to both attitudes in different ways. Although FLP models offer valuable micro-level detail, this study views such practices as embedded within broader social structures. Thus, language transmission is interpreted through Bourdieu's notion of inherited cultural capital and the social positioning of Romani within the linguistic market.

Language Maintenance

Bourdieu's (1991) framework is particularly useful for analysing how power relations influence the maintenance, or erosion, of minority languages like Romani. In this section, language maintenance literature is briefly introduced to contextualise how symbolic power and capital dynamics affect language practices among Roma communities.

Weinreich (1953: 68) defines language shift as "the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another." While this remains a foundational concept, contemporary research has extended the discussion to include the social, historical, and demographic factors that influence language shift in bilingual communities. Borbély (2005) identifies such factors as pivotal in shaping both the pace and direction of language shift. However, an often-overlooked dimension is the role of societal power imbalances in either accelerating or inhibiting language maintenance. In the case of marginalized communities such as the Roma, stark power differentials between minority and majority groups significantly affect the viability of minority languages like Romani. From a Bourdieusian perspective, Romani lacks symbolic capital in dominant institutions such as education, employment, and state

governance, contributing to its devaluation in public life. The social stigma attached to speaking Romani, reinforced by stereotypes and discrimination, further undermines efforts to assert and maintain the language. These structural inequities in social, economic, and political power are central drivers of language shift and must be considered to fully understand the dynamics affecting Romani and other minoritized languages.

In Ireland, limited state support for Roma education and the lack of Romani-language resources in schools have contributed to the language's marginalisation (Pavee Point, 2020; Watson et al., 2017). Romani is primarily spoken in private, while its public use is discouraged due to stigma and fear of discrimination. Younger Roma, particularly in urban areas, increasingly shift to English. The absence of Romani in state media, formal education, and adult learning reinforces this decline, signalling a broader lack of institutional recognition and support for its maintenance.

A recent study by Pauwels (2016) emphasizes that globalization and increased mobility have intensified the challenges of language maintenance. While economic and social mobility are often viewed as pathways to empowerment, they can paradoxically contribute to the decline of Romani by encouraging younger generations to adopt dominant languages in pursuit of better employment opportunities and social integration. This shift away from Romani may be seen as a response to its limited symbolic and economic capital within the broader linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 1991).

French (2015) echoes this view, arguing that dominant populations frequently perceive the use of minority languages like Romani as a form of cultural isolation, further entrenching social marginalisation. The dominance of the majority language, both economically and symbolically, often leads to a gradual erosion of minority language practices. Yet, even where Romani has declined, many Roma communities continue to assert

their ethnic identity. This illustrates that language shift is shaped by a complex interplay of structural inequality, societal attitudes, and evolving identity practices.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a critical factor in language loss, often linked to the assimilation and integration of minority groups into dominant cultures (Schwartz et al., 2017). Linguistic acculturation is frequently used as a measure of cultural integration (Valencia & Johnson, 2008; De Houwer, 2020), as it can both facilitate second-language acquisition and threaten first-language retention. Although the acculturation model has explanatory value, this study engages with it only briefly, as Bourdieu's framework more effectively captures the structural power relations shaping Roma individuals' language choices in Irish society.

Traditional models, such as Brown's (1980) four stages of acculturation - initial excitement, culture shock, culture stress, and eventual recovery, and Schumann's (1975) view of internalised adaptation, tend to frame identity and integration as linear and fixed processes. These views have been critiqued for oversimplifying the complexity of identity formation in multilingual contexts. More recent perspectives, including those of Norton (1998) and García (2009), offer a more dynamic, post-structural understanding of identity, arguing that language learning is deeply embedded in power relations and shaped by shifting social memberships. Norton (1998), for instance, emphasises that learners' access to language is tied to their positioning within specific social contexts, while García (2009) advocates for additive bilingualism, showing how individuals can maintain first-language identities while acquiring a second language. This shift in perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how language learners navigate cultural and linguistic identities in diverse and unequal societies.

Bourdieu theory: Capital

Bourdieu's (1991) theory of capital extends beyond economic wealth to include cultural, social, and symbolic capital. His framework remains foundational but has been expanded upon in contemporary research to reflect its relevance in linguistic and educational contexts.

1. Economic Capital refers to material wealth, such as income and assets, which influences access to resources and opportunities (Devlin, 2014).
2. Cultural capital comprises embodied traits (e.g., language proficiency), objectified assets (e.g., books, artefacts), and institutionalised recognition (e.g., qualifications). For Roma families, language as embodied cultural capital is central to transmitting identity and values, even when devalued by dominant institutions. Research such as Baker (2019) links cultural capital to language maintenance in marginalised minority communities.
3. Social Capital is derived from relationships and networks that provide mutual benefits. It is shaped by the structure, interpersonal dynamics, and shared norms within these relationships (Lesser, 2000; Ojo, 2019).
4. Symbolic capital refers to prestige, recognition, and social value. In Ireland, Romani lacks symbolic capital and is rarely viewed as a valued resource, influencing decisions around its maintenance and transmission. As Piller (2016) notes, language is closely tied to identity and often functions as a marker of symbolic power within society.

This study applies Bourdieu's framework to explore how Roma individuals in Ireland navigate the competing pressures of maintaining their linguistic heritage while adapting to the demands of their host society. It offers a lens through which to understand how Romani functions as both a source of identity and a potential barrier to symbolic power in dominant social fields.

Methodology

Participants and sample choice

The study recruited fifty Czech and Slovak Roma participants using non-probability convenience sampling, aiming to access individuals who were easily accessible and willing to participate. Selection criteria included:

1. Age range: Participants were aged 18 to 65+, ensuring a wide demographic representation.
2. Residency in Ireland: All participants had relocated to Ireland, with an average residency exceeding ten years, allowing for sufficient acculturation experience.
3. Accessibility: Participants were recruited through community networks, Roma advocacy groups, and personal referrals, facilitating access to a marginalized population.

Practical implementation of convenience sampling

Convenience sampling relied on the researcher's proximity to Roma communities and local relationships. Recruitment included:

- Community networks: Collaboration with Roma support organizations and leaders.
- Snowball effect: Initial participants referred others within their networks.
- Voluntary participation: Participation was voluntary, with no coercion.

Although this method facilitated recruitment, it may limit generalizability due to potential selection bias, but it provided valuable insights into Czech and Slovak Roma experiences in Ireland. The limitations of convenience sampling were mitigated by targeting a demographically and geographically diverse group across multiple counties in Ireland, allowing for richer comparative insights.

Ethical Considerations

Although most respondents completed the questionnaire, some showed fear to participate due to disclosure and association with the Roma ethnicity. Five participants out of fifty chose not to participate. Prior to discussing participant fear and non-participation, it is crucial to address the ethical considerations underpinning this project. Given the sensitivity of the study and the historical marginalization of Roma communities, particular attention was paid to ensuring ethical rigor throughout the research process.

- Informed consent: Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and could withdraw at any time.
- Confidentiality: Data was anonymized to protect participants' identities, given the stigma surrounding Roma ethnicity.
- Cultural sensitivity: Research methods were adapted to respect Roma cultural values.

Fear of disclosure and non-participation

Despite these safeguards, some participants exhibited fear about participating in the study. This hesitation stemmed from concerns about disclosing their Roma ethnicity, which is often stigmatized. Five individuals ultimately chose not to participate, underscoring the importance of addressing such fears during the recruitment and consent process. This highlights the ongoing need for researchers to build trust with marginalized communities and prioritize participant welfare in sensitive studies.

Methods and design

A paper-based questionnaire was used to conduct the present study. It consisted of closed questions exploring the use of language and open questions concerning the language attitudes. The questionnaire design employed a mixed-methods approach, enabling triangulation of data and deeper insight into both language use and affective stances. The

closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics to quantify and summarize responses. For example, some closed questions used Likert scales to gauge attitudes and perceptions, with respondents rating their agreement on a scale from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Where appropriate, cross-tabulations and correlation analyses (e.g., Spearman's rho) were conducted to explore associations between socio-biographical variables (such as age, level of education, or country of origin) and participants' attitudes toward or use of Romani. Responses to open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis, drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which included:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Generation of initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

A deductive approach was initially adopted, grounded in the study's theoretical framework, particularly regarding language ideologies and ethnolinguistic vitality. However, inductive elements emerged during the analysis, especially in areas where participants introduced unanticipated themes such as fear of linguistic surveillance or intra-community variation in Romani competence. This combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis enabled a comprehensive understanding of the data.

The questionnaire was distributed in English and Czech. Responses received in a language other than English (e.g., Czech, Slovak) were translated by the researcher. Twenty-five questions were divided into themes:

Socio-biographical data: This section seeks to obtain a socio-biographical profile from participants. It asked for information regarding respondent's age, gender, education background, country of origin and languages spoken.

Intensity and diversity of language use: The second section examines the variation of the Romani language use across three generations - grandparents, parents, and children. It sought insights into generational changes of Romani use and its importance. The questions explored the respondent's ability to speak and/or understand Romani; acquisition of Romani as first language; childhood and current intensity and diversity of the Romani language use; use of Romani by respondents' parents, grandparents, and siblings; use of Romani with other Roma people and in front of non-Roma people.

Attitudes towards Romani: This section explored the attitudes of the Roma people towards the Romani language. It indicates the intensions to transmit the language and how living in Ireland influences the opinions on Romani transmission. The questions examine how the Roma people perceive Romani, language pride, opinions on importance of the language, motivations to transmit Romani and their feelings when speaking Romani.

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses in this section revealed complex identity negotiations, often shaped by migration, racism, and intergenerational pressures. These insights complemented the numerical trends observed in the closed-ended responses.

Results

Socio-biographical data

This section provides a socio-biographical profile of the Roma respondents participating in this study, detailing their gender, age, educational background, place of birth, and linguistic attributes.

Gender distribution

Out of fifty participants, 44% (n=22) were male, and 56% (n=28) were female. The mean gender distribution aligns closely with an even split, with a standard deviation (SD) of 3.2 indicating slight variance across the sample.

Age distribution

The age distribution of respondents is as follows:

Table 1

Age distribution

Age Group	Percentage	Frequency (n)
18-24 years	34%	17
25-34 years	30%	15
35-44 years	14%	7
45-54 years	10%	5
55-64 years	10%	5
65 years and older	2%	1

The mean age was calculated to be 32.8 years with an SD of 10.5, highlighting the relatively youthful nature of the cohort.

Educational background

The respondents' highest level of education attained is presented below:

Table 2

Educational background

Educational Level	Percentage	Frequency (n)
Junior Certificate	70%	35
Leaving Certificate	24%	12
Third-Level Education	6%	3

This distribution indicates that the majority of respondents have attained basic secondary education. The mean educational attainment score was 1.36 (1 = Junior Certificate, 2 = Leaving Certificate, 3 = Third-Level Education), with an SD of 0.52.

Place of birth

Seventy percent of the participants (n=35) were born in Slovakia, while 30% (n=15) were born in the Czech Republic. The ratio remains consistent with historical migratory patterns.

Mother tongue and multilingualism

Sixty-eight percent of respondents (n=34) consider Romani their mother tongue, while 32% (n=16) identified other languages, predominantly Czech and Slovak, as their first language. Respondents elaborated on their linguistic experiences:

> "My mother tongue is Czech. My parents have always spoken with us and to each other in Czech." (R4)

> "Czech is my mother tongue; we never really used Romani in our house and our parents never spoke to us in Romani." (R11)

Regarding multilingualism, 76% (n=38) of respondents speak Romani, 66% (n=33) speak Slovak, 48% (n=24) speak English, and 44% (n=22) speak Czech. A few respondents also mentioned Polish and Hungarian. The mean number of languages spoken was 2.3 with an SD of 0.81, showing a moderate degree of multilingualism.

Intensity and diversity of Romani use

This section explores the intensity and diversity of Romani language use among participants, focusing on proficiency, usage habits, and environmental influences.

Proficiency in Romani

Seventy-two percent of respondents (n=36) speak Romani fluently, while 28% (n=14) only understand the language but do not speak it. The mean proficiency score was 1.72 (1 = Understand Only, 2 = Speak Fluently) with an SD of 0.45.

Frequency of Romani use

Table 3

Frequency of Romani use

Usage Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency (n)**
Everyday	46%	23
Rarely	40%	20
Never	14%	7

Participants who never use Romani cited lack of proficiency, non-transmission at home, and environmental factors:

"I don't speak Romani. My parents always spoke to us in Czech. Romani was never used at home." (R11)

"My parents never talked to me in that language. They wanted me and my sister to speak Slovak properly." (R2)

Environmental influences

Respondents shared that migration to Ireland and lack of exposure in their communities reduced Romani use:

"Since we live in Ireland, we got used to not speaking Romani, especially with my sister and brother." (R6)

"We never lived in a community where people would speak Romani." (R8)

Use of Romani in public and with non-Roma

Table 4

Use of Romani in public and with non-Roma

Context	Percentage (Yes)	Frequency (Yes)
Speak in Public	38%	19
Speak with Non-Roma	32%	16

Respondents who avoid using Romani in public often do so to avoid discrimination:

"In Slovakia, I avoided speaking Romani in front of non-Roma. It's different in Ireland." (R25)

"We never spoke Romani in front of non-Roma people, even as kids." (R14)

Attitudes Towards Romani

Importance of Romani

Sixty-eight percent of respondents believe Romani is an important language, while 32% disagree. Reasons for viewing Romani as unimportant include migration and the dominance of English:

> "It is not an important language for me because I am living in Ireland, and I can communicate in English worldwide." (R11)

Comfort Speaking Romani in Ireland

Table 5

Comfort Speaking Romani in Ireland

Comfort Level	Percentage	Frequency (n)
Comfortable	64%	32
Not Comfortable	36%	18

Respondents feel safer using Romani in Ireland due to reduced discrimination:

> "In Ireland, I have no problem speaking Romani in public." (R21)

Transmission of Romani to Children

Table 6

Transmission of Romani to Children

Transmission	Percentage	Frequency (n)
Transmitted	64%	32

Not Transmitted	36%	18

Those who chose not to transmit Romani cited its perceived lack of relevance:

> "I don't think Romani is important anymore, especially not in Ireland." (R23)

The mean transmission score was 1.64 (1 = Not Transmitted, 2 = Transmitted) with an SD of 0.48.

Analysis of correlations and thematic depth

Correlation analyses using Spearman's rho were conducted to explore associations between socio-biographical variables and language attitudes/use.

- Age correlated positively with both Romani proficiency ($r_s = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$) and frequency of use ($r_s = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$), indicating older participants were more likely to speak and use Romani regularly.
- Educational attainment negatively correlated with Romani use frequency ($r_s = -0.31$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting those with higher education tended to use Romani less frequently.
- Length of residency in Ireland did not significantly correlate with attitudes or use, though qualitative data suggest complex interactions between migration experience and language maintenance.

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed several nuanced insights. These qualitative themes complement the quantitative findings by elucidating underlying motivations and social pressures that shape Romani language use and attitudes in a migratory context:

- Identity and pride: Many participants expressed strong emotional attachment to Romani as a core part of their ethnic identity.

  "Speaking Romani connects me to my roots and my community." (R19)
- Stigma and concealment: Despite pride, participants reported experiences of stigma influencing language use, especially in public settings or around non-Roma.

  "I avoid speaking Romani in public to prevent negative reactions." (R7)
- Intergenerational transmission challenges: Respondents noted difficulties transmitting Romani to younger generations in Ireland, attributed to English dominance and changing community dynamics.

  "My children prefer English; Romani is not easy to maintain here." (R30)
- Community and environment: The availability of Roma networks in Ireland affected language use and attitudes, with more active communities fostering higher usage and transmission intentions.

Summary of findings

The socio-biographical data, supported by quantitative and thematic analyses, reveal significant insights into the Roma community's language use and attitudes. While Romani remains important to many, its use is influenced by migration, societal integration, and the dominance of other languages such as English. Quantitative correlations highlight the impact of factors like age and education on language maintenance, while thematic analysis uncovers complex identity negotiations and external pressures faced by the community. These findings illustrate the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage and adaptation within a multicultural context, providing a robust foundation for understanding the challenges and resilience of Romani language transmission.

Discussion and Conclusion

Bourdieu's Theory of Capital: Economic, Cultural, Social, and Symbolic Capitals

This study applies Bourdieu's (1991) theory of capital - economic, cultural, social, and symbolic - to analyze the transmission, maintenance, and perceived importance of Romani language. By embedding Bourdieu's framework throughout the research design and analysis, this study provides a deeper understanding of how language functions as a form of capital within the Roma community and in the broader sociolinguistic context.

Economic Capital

Bourdieu's concept of economic capital emphasizes how language proficiency can enhance access to employment and financial resources. While Romani does not serve as an economic asset in the contexts explored in this study, English, as a dominant majority language, holds significant economic capital. This is particularly evident in the responses of younger generations who prioritize English over Romani, recognizing that proficiency in English is directly linked to professional and educational opportunities. Participants consistently highlighted that Romani is not a language that will help them gain employment, reflecting its lack of economic capital in the contemporary context. For instance, one participant remarked: "Romani doesn't help us get jobs here. English is what's needed." (R3)

This reflects the position of Romani as a language with little or no exchange value in the dominant linguistic market, while English holds substantial symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). As such, the shift toward English can be seen not merely as a matter of personal preference or acculturation, but as a rational response to structural inequalities in language valuation. Economic capital shapes the hierarchy of languages in society, with English positioned as the gateway to employment and education (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Nevertheless, some participants still expressed a desire to transmit Romani, motivated more by cultural pride and identity than financial incentives.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital, particularly in its embodied form, plays a central role in the transmission of Romani. Respondents consistently valued the language as a marker of ethnic identity and cultural pride. Language was viewed as integral to heritage and social practices, with many noting: “Speaking Romani keeps us connected to who we are.” (R14)

Intergenerational transmission, especially from grandparents, emerged as a key mechanism for preserving Romani, echoing Bourdieu’s notion that cultural capital is often reproduced within the family (Devlin, 2014; Ishizawa, 2004). However, cultural capital only holds weight when legitimised in dominant social fields. In this study, Romani's perceived value declined among younger generations and in public spaces where English dominates.

Social Capital

Social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1991), refers to the resources accessible through social networks and group membership. Within the Roma community, Romani serves as a form of bonding social capital, fostering connection and a shared sense of identity. Many respondents highlighted its role in reinforcing group cohesion, with one noting: “When we speak Romani, it’s like we belong to something bigger.” (R22)

However, this capital holds limited value outside the in-group. Fear of discrimination discourages public use of Romani, restricting its utility in wider Irish society. This reflects Bourdieu’s notion that the convertibility of social capital depends on legitimacy within dominant social fields. Romani’s lack of prestige hinders its potential as bridging capital, complicating efforts to navigate dual cultural identities. As Kamo (1998) notes, minority groups often struggle to balance internal solidarity with the external pressures of assimilation and public perception.

Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital refers to the prestige and recognition associated with particular practices or assets. For many Roma respondents, Romani symbolises ethnic pride and cultural identity. However, this symbolic value is not consistently recognised across social contexts. In Ireland, Romani's relative invisibility in public discourse creates a form of "safe invisibility," where speakers feel freer to use it without facing the overt discrimination they might encounter elsewhere. As one respondent noted: "In Slovakia, speaking Romani could get you treated badly. Here in Ireland, people don't know what it is, so it feels safer." (R9)

Yet this invisibility also reflects the language's absence from institutional recognition. While Romani may hold symbolic capital within private and familial settings, it lacks legitimacy in dominant public spaces. This limits its convertibility into other forms of capital and reduces its perceived value—particularly among younger Roma, who are socialised into linguistic markets where English is associated with status and opportunity. These findings echo Devlin's (2014) work, which highlights how minority languages can be both sources of cultural pride and barriers to social integration when lacking wider societal recognition.

Integrating Bourdieu's Framework into study design

The research questions and methodology were explicitly aligned with Bourdieu's theoretical framework to explore how Romani operates across economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. The study examined how Roma speakers negotiate tensions between private linguistic legitimacy and public devaluation. Rather than treating language attitudes or transmission as discrete psychological processes, the study views them as products of structural inequalities, social hierarchies, and the distribution of linguistic capital within Irish society, revealing the complex interplay between language, power, identity, and social structures.

Implications of findings

The findings demonstrate how Romani functions as a multidimensional form of capital whose value shifts depending on the social field. They reinforce the view that linguistic behaviour cannot be separated from broader power relations, and that minority language practices are profoundly shaped by the struggle for recognition, legitimacy, and access to valued capital. Several key implications arise:

Economic Capital: English dominates as the economically valued language. Romani has no exchange value in the labour market, contributing to its erosion. Language shift is thus best understood not as cultural assimilation but as a rational adaptation to an unequal linguistic economy (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Cultural Capital: Romani retains cultural significance within the Roma community, particularly through intergenerational practices. However, its cultural capital is not institutionally recognised, reducing its perceived worth among younger generations. This reflects broader patterns of minority language devaluation in dominant linguistic markets.

Social Capital: Romani builds intra-community bonds but is hindered in broader networks by social stigma and fear of discrimination. Its function as "bonding capital" does not translate into bridging capital. This supports Schieffelin and Ochs' (1986) view that language socialisation shapes not only communicative practices but also access to culturally mediated social resources.

Symbolic Capital: Romani has symbolic value in private but is largely invisible and unrecognised in public. This asymmetry undermines its role in shaping broader social status or opportunity. As Devlin (2014) argues, symbolic capital is context-dependent and can reinforce or limit group identity depending on the societal recognition it receives.

Recommendations for Future Research

Building on these findings, future research could benefit from exploring the following directions to further understand how Romani functions as a form of capital. These avenues below would help situate Romani language practices within broader power structures and deepen our understanding of how capital, linguistic and otherwise, is negotiated in minority language communities.

Longitudinal Studies: Conduct long-term research to track how Romani's symbolic and cultural capital evolves across generations, particularly in response to changing socio-political and economic conditions. This aligns with the work of Fishman (1972) and Mancilla-Martinez & Kieffer (2010), who highlight the importance of intergenerational patterns in language maintenance and shift.

Comparative Sociolinguistic Analysis: Undertake comparative studies of Roma communities in different national contexts, particularly between countries where Romani is recognised in official discourse and those where it is not. This could illuminate how institutional recognition, or the lack thereof, affects the distribution and convertibility of linguistic capital (Stevens, 1985; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Role of Education and Policy: Investigate how educational systems and state language policies either reinforce or challenge the symbolic devaluation of Romani. Special attention should be given to how language ideologies embedded in curriculum and policy frameworks influence young Roma speakers' attitudes and transmission practices.

Conclusion

Bourdieu's theory of capital provides a powerful and nuanced framework for analysing the dynamics of Romani language use, transmission, and perception among Roma in Ireland. This study demonstrates that Romani operates as a form of cultural, social, and symbolic

capital, though its lack of economic and institutional value significantly weakens its position within dominant social fields. By framing Romani within the logic of the linguistic market, the study reveals how structural inequalities, social hierarchies, and symbolic power shape intergenerational attitudes and language choices. Maintenance of Romani is not merely an act of cultural pride or individual will; rather, it reflects the Roma community's negotiation of unequal access to legitimacy, opportunity, and recognition in wider Irish society. This deeper engagement with Bourdieu's theory enhances both the scientific rigour and conceptual coherence of the study. It underscores that language is not simply a neutral tool of communication or a static cultural artefact, but a form of capital whose value is context-dependent, contested, and politically charged. By embedding Bourdieu's concepts into both the research design and analysis, the study offers important insights into how language mediates identity formation, social cohesion, and cultural resilience in a migratory and marginalised context. It ultimately contributes to a richer understanding of the sociolinguistic forces that shape the lived experiences of Roma communities in contemporary Ireland.

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