

## THE USE OF THE RUSYN LANGUAGE AMONG BI/ MULTILINGUAL SPEAKERS OF THE RUTHENIAN COMMUNITY IN VOJVODINA, SERBIA, IN INNER SPEECH

The topic of the paper is the use of Rusyn language among bi-/multilingual speakers from Serbia (Vojvodina: Ruski Krstur, Kucura, Novi Sad) during inner speech – thoughts, counting, prayers and dreams. In the research, a sociolinguistic questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was completed by 78 respondents (bi-/multilingual speakers from the Ruthenian community). Along with each question in the questionnaire, several answers were offered, and respondents circled the one they believed best reflected their language use in the corresponding situation (the answers were for example, Serbian, both languages equally, or some other language). When analyzing the responses, the following parameters were taken into account: links between demographic as well as language-related variables and language use when talking silently. The aim of the research is to show how deeply rooted the language is in the thought processes of bi-/multilingual speakers from Serbia and how often they use it when engaging in those processes, based on the previously mentioned parameters.

*Keywords:* Rusyn language, Ruthenian community, bi-/multilingual speakers, Vojvodina, inner speech.

В статье рассматривается использование русинского языка двуязычными жителями Сербии (Воеводина: Руски Крстур, Кучура, Нови-Сад) во внутренней речи, т.е. в процессах мышления, счета, молитвы и сновидений. В ходе исследования был использован социолингвистический опросник. Анкету заполнили 78 респондентов (представители русинской общины, говорящие на двух языках). На каждый вопрос в анкете предлагалось несколько вариантов ответа, и респонденты обводили кружком тот, который, по их мнению, лучше всего отражает использование им языков в соответствующей ситуации (например, русинский, сербский, оба языка в равной степени или какой-либо другой язык). При анализе ответов учитывались следующие параметры: связи между демографическими и языковыми переменными, а также использование языка при беззвучном разговоре. Цель исследования – показать, насколько глубоко укоренился русинский язык в мыслительных процессах двуязычных жителей Сербии и как часто они используют его при участии в этих процессах, основываясь на ранее упомянутых параметрах.

*Ключевые слова:* русинский язык, русинское сообщество, двуязычные носители языка, Воеводина, внутренняя речь.

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## 1. Introduction

It is a fact that there is no single standard of the Rusyn<sup>1 2</sup> language, but rather several. The Vojvodinian standard differs from the so-called Prešov standard in Slovakia or from the Lemko standard in Poland. The latter, unlike the Vojvodinian Rusyn standard, are in relatively early stages of standardization (Dulichenko 2008: 19–22).

Rusyn is classified as a so-called microlanguage. The term *microlanguage* first appeared in the mid-1960s, followed later by related terms like *microlinguistics* and *microphilology*. Initially, the idea of a microlanguage – though not yet called that – was applied only to South Rusyn. However, starting in the 1970s, it began to be used for a broader category of similar languages. As the concept evolved, microlinguistics came to refer to the study of these types of languages, while microphilology expanded that scope to also include their related literatures. Today, Slavic microlinguistics is taking shape as a field that deals with about 20 micro-languages, which can be grouped into four main categories: autonomous languages, insular languages, peripheral–insular languages, peripheral (or regional) languages (Dulichenko: 2018: 3).

When it comes to the origins of the Rusyn language, according to Lj. Popović (2010: 83), linguists remain divided. Some, like Sven Gustavsson, classify it as part of the West Slavic languages and support the Proto-Slovak hypothesis. Others argue that Rusyn is a separate East Slavic language, potentially a branch of Ukrainian – this view was advocated by the creators of the first Rusyn grammars in Vojvodina, Havrijil Kosteljnjk and Mikola Kočiš, as well as Ukrainian

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1 Based on the *Introduction to the Encyclopedia of Rusyn history and culture* the Rusyns – also referred to as Carpatho-Rusyns, Carpatho-Russians, Carpatho-Ukrainians, Lemkos, Rusnaks, Ruthenians, and Uhro-Rusyns – are a Slavic ethnic group native to Central Europe. Their traditional homeland, known as Carpathian Rus', today spans across parts of Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania. This region is a continuous geographic area historically inhabited primarily by Rusyns. Depending on the country, different names are used to refer to areas with Rusyn populations: the Lemko Region in Poland, the Prešov Region in Slovakia, Subcarpathian Rus' in Ukraine, and Maramureş in Romania. Smaller Rusyn communities also exist in northeastern Hungary and Serbia's Vojvodina. Additionally, Rusyn immigrants and their descendants have established communities in countries like the Czech Republic, Canada, and especially the United States (Magoesi 2005: vii–ix).

2 According to Wayles Browne, in the *Introduction to the Approaches to Rusyn 2017* (Browne 2017: ii), for example, after the fall of the Communist regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1989, and Ukraine's independence from the collapsing Soviet Union in 1991, the Rusyn people were in a much better position to create organizations and begin standardizing their language – if they chose to do so. Since then, Rusyn has become relatively well standardized in Slovakia, where it has received varying levels of government funding for institutions, media, and publications. In Poland, the Lemko variety has also been fairly well standardized and is used in publishing and some educational settings. In contrast, several individuals in Ukraine have proposed different standards, but these efforts have received little to no official support or recognition.

scholars J. Dzendzelivski, P. Čučka, and Lj. Belej. A third perspective, represented by Julijan Ramač, considers it a distinct East Slavic language that emerged at the intersection of East and West Slavic languages.

Vojvodinian Rusyn (or Vojvodinian Ruthenian), or Pannonian Rusyn (or Pannonian Ruthenian) are the best terms for the language of the respondents in this study.

Some of the most important research on the topic of the Vojvodinian Rusyn microlanguage includes:

Duličenko, A. D. *Jugoslavo-Ruthenica. Works in Rusyn Philology* (Novi Sad, 1995)

Duličenko, A. D. *Jugoslavo-Ruthenica II. Works in Rusyn Philology and History* (Novi Sad: Faculty of Philosophy, 2009).

The Rusyns have resided in what is now the province of Vojvodina, in northern Serbia, for more than 270 years. Their migration to this area, which was part of southern Hungary at the time, took place in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century following the end of the Austro-Turkish wars in 1738, after the Ottoman Empire had been driven out of Central Europe (Hardi 2012: 389).

According to V. S. Gavrilović (2012: 21) most Rusyns who migrated from Zakarpattia were settled in central Bačka, on land managed by the Bačka Chamber Administration headquartered in Sombor. This colonization occurred between 1743 and 1751, with the largest number of settlers arriving in the villages of Krstur and Kucura.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, smaller groups of Rusyns had begun settling in the vicinity of Novi Sad, establishing themselves in nearby towns and villages such as Futog, Kisač, Petrovaradin, Sremska Kamenica, Sremski Karlovci, and Temerin. In the early 1800s, records show that 67 Rusyns were living in Petrovaradin, with 37 of them owning their own homes. According to a military census conducted in the Military Frontier in 1810, 80 Rusyns were also registered in the Šajkaš Battalion. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their population in the Šajkaška region gradually increased, reaching 405 individuals by the century's end – more than 300 of whom lived in the village of Đurđevo (also V. S. Gavrilović 2012: 23–24).

According to Slavko Gavrilović (1967: 106–113) the settlement of Rusyns in Vojvodina began in 1751 with their arrival in Ruski Krstur. However, the exact year when Vojvodinian Rusyns settled in the other Bačka village, Kucura, remains uncertain to this day.

As traditional adherents of Eastern Christianity, the majority of Rusyns are Greek Catholics. Total population of Rusyns in Serbia on this day is: 11,483



(2022), while the number of Rusyns whose mother tongue is Rusyn is 8725, 4180 men and 4545 women (2022).<sup>3</sup>

We will begin the paper with a literature review, specifically defining bilingualism, multilingualism, and inner speech, as well as the use of inner speech in the context of bi-/multilingualism. The next section of the paper will be dedicated to the questions and methodology, which includes a description of the questionnaire items, the research instrument, respondents, independent and dependent variables. The results will be interpreted in relation to the literature views. In the conclusion, we will summarize the findings.

## 2. Literature Review

The Rusyn community in Serbia is at least bilingual in Rusyn and Serbian, and possibly multilingual in other languages.

American linguist Leonard Bloomfield stated that bilingual is a person who knows two languages equally well. Bloomfield (1933: 56) defines bilingualism as “native-like control of two languages”.

According to Zhang (2023: 83) this limited definition has been criticized for its apparent oversimplicity and lack of clarity, and it has also led to many individuals who are proficient in two languages being excluded from being considered bilinguals.

Weinreich (1953: 1) considers bilingualism “the practice of alternately using two languages”.

Recently, bilingualism has been somewhat redefined. Baker (2011: 5) emphasizes that understanding bilingualism involves considering both the use and function of bilingual’s two languages. Nagel et al. (2015: 219) broadly define bilinguals as individuals or groups of people who obtain the knowledge and use of more than one language and who have various degrees of proficiency in both languages.

Recent research has embraced a more inclusive definition of bilingualism to account for individuals with varying levels of language skills across multiple domains (Zhang 2023: 84).

According to Butler (2012: 111–112) multilingual individuals are described as people or groups who acquire communicative competence in multiple languages, with varying levels of proficiency, in both spoken and/or written forms, to engage with speakers of one or more languages within a particular society. The term “bilingual” specifically refers to those who use two languages, while “multilingual” applies to those who use more than two languages, such as trilinguals, quadrilinguals, and others. A variety of terms are closely associated with multilingualism, such as *bilingualism*, *plurilingualism*, *polylingualism*, *metrolingualism*, *heteroglossia*, *language or linguistic repertoire*, and *monolingualism*,

3 Census of Population 2022 in Serbia.

among others. Multilingualism is described as “an umbrella term for linguistic diversity or even super diversity” (Vetter and Jessner 2019: 2).

Inner speech (IS) is a term first introduced by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky to describe how the private speech (PS) of young children – talking aloud to themselves during play – evolves to accompany their cognitive tasks (Vygotsky 1934). Inner speech has been described in several ways, with a common definition being “the activity of talking to oneself in silence” (Morin 2012: 436). According to Guerrero (2005: 64), inner speech as a mental activity, must be distinguished from private speech, which refers to “audible” speech. According to Vygotsky (1986), private (in his terms: egocentric) speech is a predecessor to inner speech in children, who initially speak aloud to themselves to address problems or cognitive challenges, thus aiding their cognitive development. Recent research, such as Mani and Plunkett (2010: 912) have shown that infants also may use language covertly.

### 3. Research Questions

The main question we will attempt to answer in this paper is the following: Do bilingual and multilingual speakers of Rusyn use their first language (L1 — Rusyn) more than their second language (L2 — Serbian) during inner speech in a country where L2 is more prevalent and in which they are predominantly surrounded?

Sub-questions:

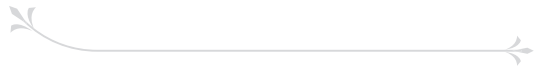
1. Do bilingual and multilingual speakers of Rusyn think more often in Rusyn (L1) or in Serbian (L2)?
2. Do the aforementioned speakers count to themselves in Rusyn (L1) or in Serbian (L2)?
3. Do the aforementioned speakers pray in Rusyn or in Serbian?
4. Do the aforementioned speakers dream in Rusyn or in Serbian?

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1. Research Instrument

This paper was written within the framework of the VlingS project – “Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia” within the program IDEAS (2022–2024). A sociolinguistic questionnaire<sup>4</sup> was used for the project, which was completed by a total of 78 Rusyn speakers. The research was conducted in the villages of Ruski Krstur and Kucura, as well as in the city of Novi Sad (all located in Vojvodina, Serbia), during the summer of 2023.

4 For a detailed insight into the questionnaire, please refer to *Vulnerable and Endangered Languages in Europe*, p. 367–379.



The questionnaire includes 151 questions divided into the following 16 sections:<sup>5</sup>

- I General data about linguonyms and language usage
- II Data about language acquisition and intergenerational language transmission
- III Domains of language usage
- IV Literacy
- V Education
- VI Institutional support and linguistic landscape
- VII Publications in the given language
- VIII Media
- IX Religious service
- X Cultural manifestations
- XI Language level self-assessment
- XII Respondents' feelings towards own language
- XIII Ethnic and cultural identity
- XIV Language maintenance and revitalization
- XV Demographic information about the respondent
- XVI Final remarks

The paper is based on four questions from the third section from the questionnaire:

1. In which language do you think?
2. In which language do you count (to yourself)?
3. In which language do you pray?
4. In which language do you dream?

The answers in this part of the questionnaire were multiple choice, and the options included the following:

1. In Rusyn;
2. In Serbian;
3. In both Rusyn and Serbian;
4. In another language;
5. I don't know.

#### 4.2. Respondents

All respondents signed the informed consent form in front of the researchers, in which they were informed about the goals of the study, participating institutions, data anonymisation procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study.

5 VlingS Questionnaire 1.0 – English translation.

The questionnaire was completed by 78 respondents, divided into four age groups.

Education: Out of the total number of respondents (78), 2 completed primary school, 4 completed three-year secondary school, 26 completed four-year secondary school or gymnasium, 5 completed higher education, 34 completed college or academy, and 7 completed postgraduate or doctoral studies. From this information, it is evident that the majority of respondents who participated in the questionnaire had a higher education, followed by those with completed secondary education.

When it comes to their mother tongue, 7 out of 78 respondents reported that their mother tongue is both Rusyn and Serbian, one person reported Ukrainian as their mother tongue, while the remaining 70 respondents stated that their mother tongue is Rusyn.

To the question of which language they use today, all respondents answered that they use Rusyn along with at least one other language, meaning that they are all bilingual or multilingual.

To present their linguistic background we are adding the information whether they acquired Rusyn from childhood and from whom did they learn it the most. The questionnaire provided multiple answers, but the respondents could circle only one:

1. From parents.
2. From grandparents.
3. From members of the extended family.
4. From speakers outside the family.
5. At work.
6. Independently (from books, from TV).
7. At school (or preschool).
8. Through language workshops/classes.
9. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
10. I didn't learn the language.

Almost all respondents (76 of them) acquired Rusyn from childhood, before they were 7 years old. Only one person started learning Rusyn after they were 7 years old and only one person started learning Rusyn as an adult (a Ukrainian native speaker). Most of the respondents learned Rusyn from their parents (71 people), 5 people learned Rusyn from their grandparents, 1 person acquired Rusyn in school and 1 person in some other way.

#### 4.3. Independent and Dependent Variables

We examined how the following variables affect the use of L1:

1. Independent variables: a) demographic ones (age, gender, and level of education); b) Which language is the respondents' mother tongue, how





many languages they speak, and how proficient they are in Rusyn compared to Serbian (self-assessment of language proficiency).

2. Dependent variables: responses to the questions on inner speech, which will be measured in percentages of the respondents who chose a particular answer.

### 5. Language level self-assessment

For this research we wanted to determine the respondents' level of language proficiency and for that purpose we chose a few questions from the questionnaire that depict their own language level self-assessment.

This part of the sociolinguistic questionnaire was asking respondents to self-evaluate their linguistic competence in the target language and Serbian on a five-point scale, across language comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

How well do you understand Rusyn?

Out of 78 respondents, 76 gave the highest score (5), one respondent rated it a 4, and one rated it a 3.

How well do you understand Serbian?

Out of 78 respondents, 75 gave the highest score (5), 2 respondents rated it a 4, and 1 respondent rated it a 3.

How well do you speak Rusyn?

Out of 78 respondents, 68 gave the highest score (5), 7 respondents rated it a 4, and 3 respondents rated it a 3.

How well do you speak Serbian?

Out of 78 respondents, 66 gave the highest score (5), and 12 respondents rated it a 4.

How well do you read Rusyn (any type of content, including messages)?

Out of 78 respondents, 75 gave the highest score (5), 1 respondent rated it a 4, 1 respondent rated it a 3, and 1 respondent rated it a 2.

How well do you read Serbian (any type of content, including messages)?

Out of 78 respondents, 73 gave the highest score (5), and 5 respondents rated it a 4.

How well do you write in Rusyn (any type of content, including messages)?

Out of 78 respondents, 63 gave the highest score (5), 9 respondents rated it a 4, 5 respondents rated it a 3, and 1 respondent rated it a 2.

How well do you write in Serbian (any type of content, including messages)?

Out of 78 respondents, 68 gave a score of 5, 8 rated it a 4, and 2 respondents rated it a 3.



Regarding the self-assessment of language proficiency, respondents rated their language abilities very highly. Over 80% of respondents gave the highest scores for writing and speaking in both Serbian and Rusyn, while over 90% rated their understanding and reading of content in both languages at the highest level.

The individuals in question evaluate their proficiency in both Rusyn and Serbian similarly, perceiving themselves as highly competent in both languages. This self-assessment suggests a level of confidence in their ability to communicate in both languages with ease, probably due to their familiarity and experience with both linguistic systems. The highest marks indicate that they believe their skills in understanding, reading, writing and speaking in these languages are advanced, even though their actual proficiency may vary in different contexts or domains.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. The effect of age on the choice of language during thought processes Through descriptive statistics, we obtained the following data:

In the first age group (ages 18 to 29, totaling 13 respondents), 8 respondents (61.53%) reported that they think in Rusyn, 2 respondents (15.38%) think in Serbian, and 3 respondents (23.08%) reported that they think equally in both languages.

In the second age group (ages 30 to 44, totaling 24 respondents), 16 respondents (67.67%) think in Rusyn, 1 respondent (4.17%) reported thinking in Serbian, and 7 respondents (29.17%) think in both Rusyn and Serbian.

In the third age group (ages 45 to 59, totaling 20 respondents), 13 respondents (65.00%) think in Rusyn, 1 respondent (5.00%) thinks in Serbian, and 6 respondents (30.00%) think in both languages.

In the oldest, fourth age group (ages 60 and above), 11 respondents (52.38%) think in Rusyn, 1 respondent (4.76%) thinks in Serbian, 8 respondents (38.09%) think in both languages, and only 1 respondent (4.76%) answered that they do not know in which language they think. (Figure 1a and 1b)

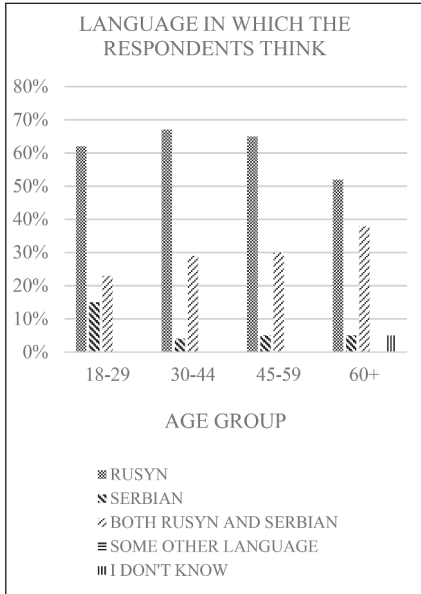


Figure 1a

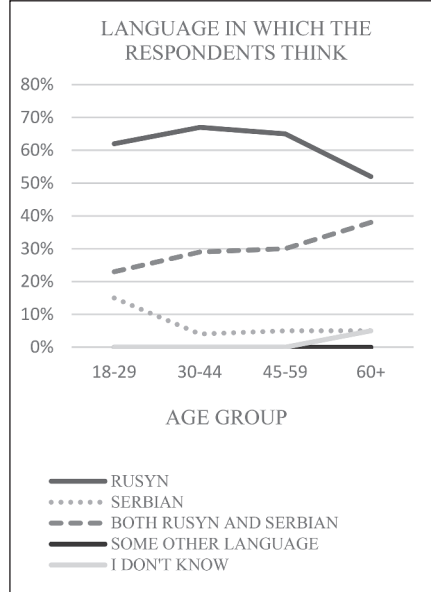


Figure 1b

We have concluded that the Rusyn language is the dominant influence on the cognitive processes of individuals in all four age groups. This indicates that, regardless of their age, Rusyn speakers consistently use their native language when performing tasks that involve mental activity. The prominence of Rusyn in shaping thought processes seems to be a fundamental element of their cognitive structure, reflecting its strong and lasting role in everyday life. This discovery could have significant implications for both language preservation and educational strategies, emphasizing the crucial role of Rusyn in ensuring cognitive consistency across generations.

The analysis showed that out of 78 respondents, consisting of 32 men and 46 women, 15 male respondents (46.88%) think in Rusyn, while 33 women (71.74%) think in Rusyn. Two men (6.25%) and 3 women (6.52%) think in Serbian, 14 men (43.75%) and 10 women (21.74%) think in both languages, and only 1 man (3.13%) responded that he does not know in which language he thinks. (Figure 2a and 2b)

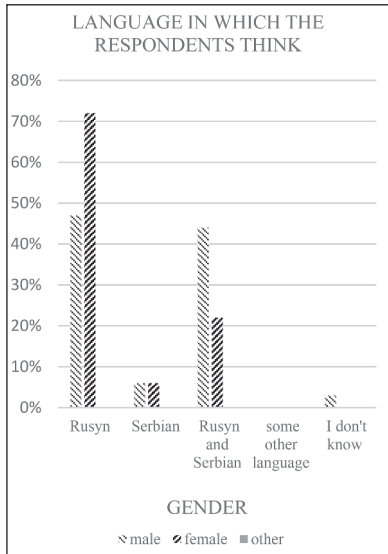


Figure 2a

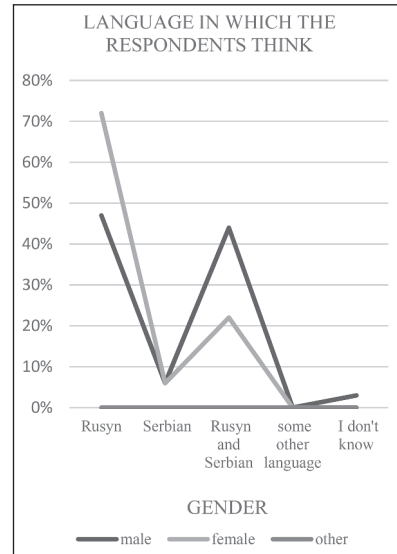


Figure 2b

Based on the analysis, we have concluded that women tend to think in Rusyn more frequently than men. This pattern suggests that, when engaging in various cognitive tasks, women are more likely to rely on Rusyn language in comparison to men, who may use it less often or switch to other languages (mostly Serbian) during thought processes. This may indicate that, for women, Rusyn plays a more prominent role in shaping their cognitive framework, potentially affecting how they perceive and interact with the world around them. This trend could have further implications for understanding language use across genders, highlighting the importance of considering gender differences in studies of language and thought.

## 6.2. The effect of aged on the choice of language during COUNTING (to themselves)

A total of 77 respondents answered the question.

In the first age group, 8 respondents (61.54%) reported that they count to themselves in Rusyn, 3 respondents (23.08%) stated they use Serbian for this purpose, and 2 respondents (15.38%) indicated that they count equally in both languages.

In the second age group, 17 respondents (73.91%) said they count in Rusyn, 3 respondents (13.04%) in Serbian, 2 respondents (8.70%) count to themselves in both languages, and 1 person (4.35%) answered that they do not know.

In the third age group, 15 respondents (78.95%) count to themselves in Rusyn, 2 respondents (10.53%) in Serbian, the same percentage counts in both languages, and 1 person did not provide an answer.



In the fourth age group, 16 respondents (76.19%) count to themselves in Rusyn, 2 respondents (9.52%) count in Serbian, and 3 respondents (14.29%) count in both languages. (Figure 3a and 3b)

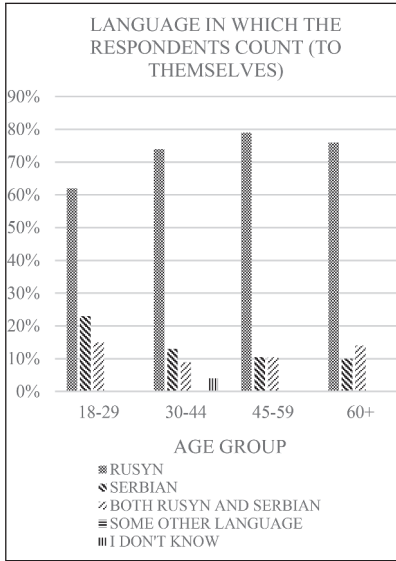


Figure 3a

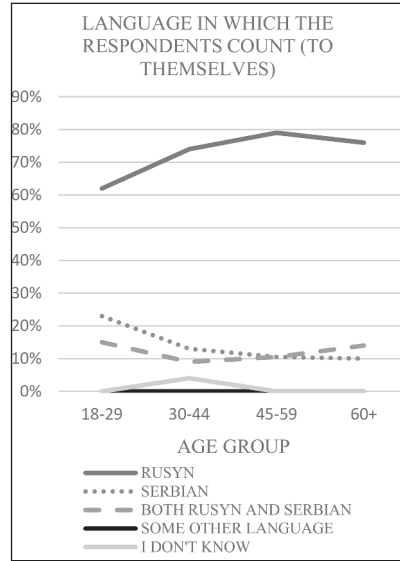


Figure 3b

The analysis showed that, across all age groups, respondents predominantly use Rusyn when counting to themselves. This suggests that, regardless of their age, individuals instinctively turn to Rusyn for mental tasks such as counting. It seems that Rusyn is deeply embedded in their everyday cognitive processes, indicating its strong influence on their thought patterns. This preference for Rusyn in such a basic mental function highlights the language's significant role in shaping how individuals process information internally.

Through descriptive statistics of the data, we have concluded that out of a total of 77 respondents who answered the given question in the questionnaire, 21 men (67.74%) count to themselves in Rusyn, while 36 women (78.26%) also count in Rusyn. In Serbian, 5 men (16.13%) and 5 women (10.87%) count to themselves, while 5 men (16.13%) and 4 women (8.70%) count in both Rusyn and Serbian. Only 1 woman (2.17%) stated that she does not know in which language she counts. One respondent did not provide an answer to the question. (Figure 4a and 4b)

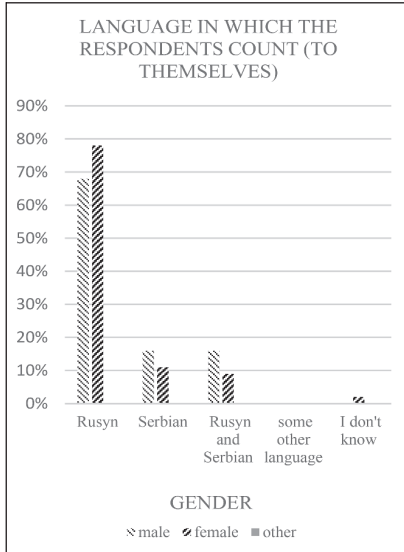


Figure 4a

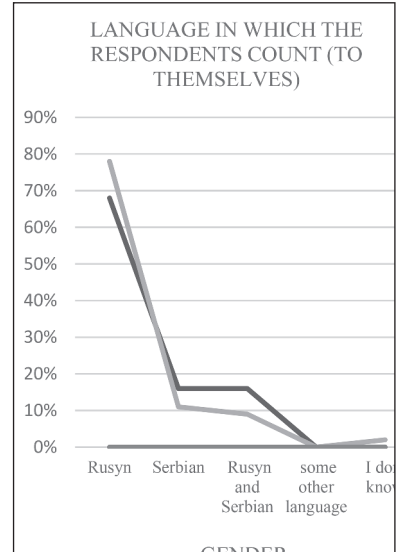


Figure 4b

Our analysis suggests that women are more likely than men to use Rusyn when counting to themselves. This indicates that Rusyn plays a more prominent role in the internal cognitive processes of women, potentially influencing how they perform everyday tasks like counting. In contrast, men may be more inclined to use other languages (especially Serbian) in these situations. This difference may reflect underlying cultural, social, or psychological factors that affect language choice and cognitive patterns. The finding emphasizes the potential impact of gender on language use and mental processes within the community.

### 6.3. The effect of age on the choice of language during prayers

In the first age group, 10 respondents (83.33%) out of 12 stated that they pray in Rusyn, 1 respondent (8.33%) said they pray in both Rusyn and Serbian, and the same number, 1 person, answered that they do not know, while 1 person did not answer the question.

In the second age group, 20 respondents (86.96%) said they pray in Rusyn, 1 person (4.35%) in both languages, and 2 people (8.70%) in another language.

In the third age group, 13 respondents (68.42%) reported that they pray in Rusyn, 1 person (5.26%) in both Rusyn and Serbian, 3 people (15.79%) in another language, 2 people (10.53%) answered that they do not know, and 2 individuals from this group did not respond to the question.

In the fourth age group, 16 respondents (80.00%) pray in Rusyn, 4 respondents (20.00%) in another language, and 1 person did not answer the question. (Figure 5a and 5b)

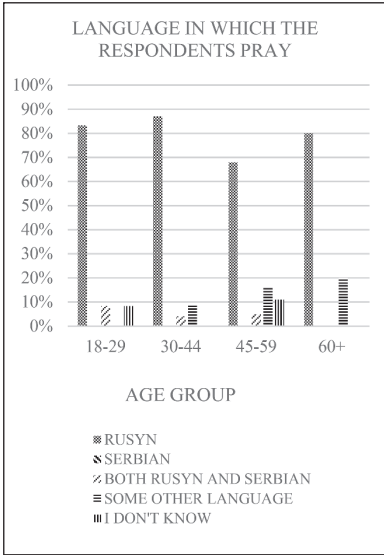
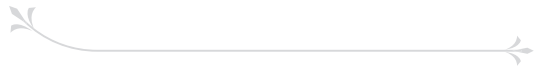


Figure 5a

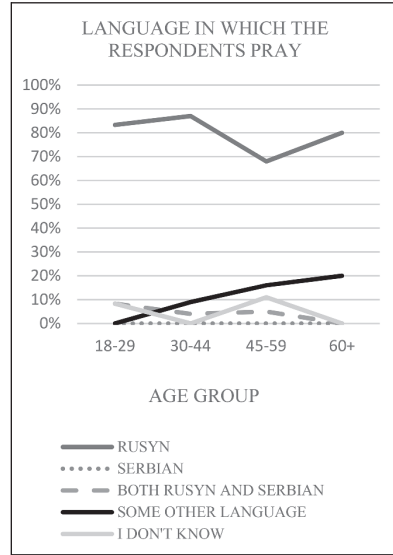


Figure 5b

When it comes to prayers, the respondents across all age groups overwhelmingly choose to pray in Rusyn, with a high percentage of individuals reporting its use. This suggests that Rusyn holds a significant place in the spiritual and religious practices of the community, transcending age differences. The consistent preference for Rusyn in prayer reflects the language’s deep cultural and emotional ties. The high percentage of respondents using Rusyn in this context highlights the language’s ongoing role in maintaining religious identity and continuity within the community, despite the potential influence of Serbian in everyday communication.

Based on the descriptive statistics, we observe that out of 74 respondents who answered this question in the questionnaire (30 men and 44 women), 19 men (63.33%) pray in Rusyn, while 40 women (90.90%) also pray in Rusyn.

In both languages, Rusyn and Serbian, 2 men (6.67%) and 1 woman (2.27%) pray, while 6 men (20.00%) and 3 women (6.82%) pray in another language. Additionally, 3 men (10.00%) answered that they do not know, and 2 men and 2 women did not respond to this question. (Figure 6a and 6b)

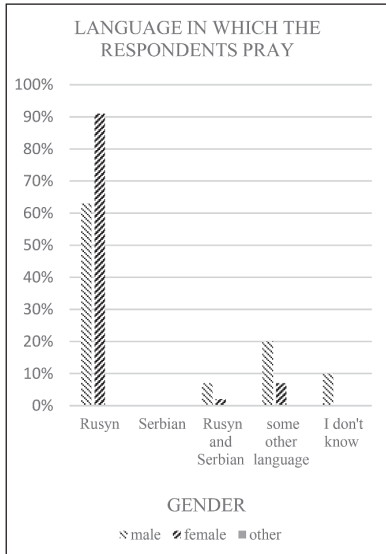


Figure 6a

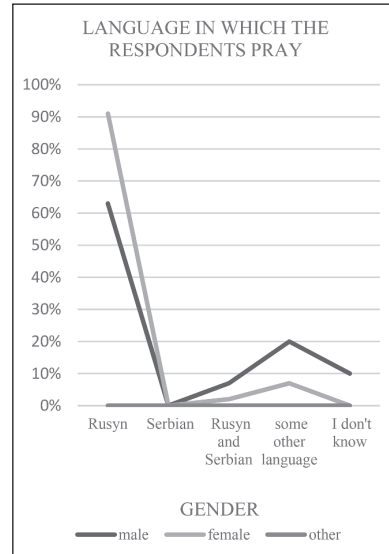


Figure 6b

After analyzing the data, we have concluded that women tend to use Rusyn more frequently than men during prayer. This suggests that for women, Rusyn holds a special place in their spiritual and religious practices, serving as the primary language of devotion. On the other hand, men seem to alternate between Rusyn and Serbian, or in some cases, rely more heavily on Old Church Slavonic. Old Church Slavonic, which is often used in Ruthenian church services, may play a more prominent role in men's prayers, particularly in the context of formal or liturgical settings. This distinction could reflect differences in how gender influences language choice in religious rituals, as well as the broader cultural and historical significance of Old Church Slavonic within the community's religious traditions. The findings highlight the complex relationship between language, gender, and religious practice, and suggest that women may have a stronger attachment to Rusyn in their spiritual lives, while men may navigate a broader linguistic range in their prayers.

In this section of the paper, we will need to point out the potential limitations of the study: Although individuals in churches most commonly recite two basic prayers—*Our Father* and *Hail Mary*—which the Vojvodinian Rusyns know in the Ukrainian recension of Church Slavonic, some respondents claimed to pray in the Rusyn language, which potentially reveals both terminological and linguistic confusion. While a few prayers in Rusyn may occasionally be heard during the liturgy and are known by certain individuals, they do not constitute a regular part of everyday devotional practice. Therefore, such responses cannot be considered definitive evidence of Rusyn being actively used in daily religious contexts.





The variation in responses – some indicating Church Slavonic and others Rusyn – may indicate that the survey questions lacked sufficient precision to clearly distinguish the language in question, or it may reflect limited linguistic awareness among participants, which is understandable considering that most do not have a linguistic background. It is also possible that some of the respondents, when answering the question about prayer or religious practice, were referring to private, individual prayer rather than prayers during the liturgy. They may have had in mind that they engage in prayer alone, at home or in a personal setting, rather than participating in formal religious services held in a church. (Such a response was allowed during the administration of the questionnaire and interviews.)

Thus, the answers in this section are applied to any kind of prayer, regardless of its time, place and manner.

#### 6.4. The effect of age on the choice of language during dreams

To the question of which language they dream in, 77 respondents provided answers.

In the first age group, according to the questionnaire, 4 individuals (30.77%) out of 13 reported dreaming in Rusyn, 1 respondent (7.69%) dreams in Serbian, 4 individuals (30.77%) hear their dreams in both languages, and the remaining 4 (30.77%) do not know in which language they dream.

In the second age group, 4 respondents (17.39%) dream in Rusyn, 1 respondent (4.35%) dreams in Serbian, 8 individuals (34.78%) dream in both languages, and 10 individuals (43.48%) do not know in which language they dream.

In the third age group, 8 respondents (40.00%) indicated that they dream in Rusyn, 1 person (5.00%) stated that they dream in Serbian, 3 individuals (15.00%) dream in both Rusyn and Serbian, and 8 respondents (40%) do not know in which language they dream.

In the last age group, 10 respondents (47.62%) said they dream in Rusyn, 3 respondents (14.29%) dream in both Rusyn and Serbian, and 8 respondents (38.10%) do not know in which language they dream. (Figure 7a and 7b)

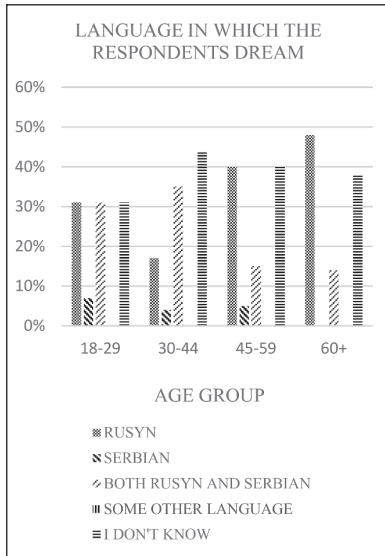


Figure 7a

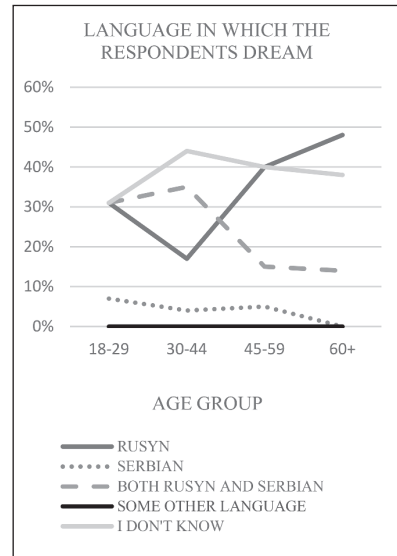


Figure 7b

Based on the information we gathered, we have concluded that the fourth age group – typically the oldest demographic – shows the strongest inclination to preserve their Rusyn identity, especially when it comes to their dreams. This group appears to be most connected to their cultural and linguistic roots, often dreaming in Rusyn, which indicates a deep, ongoing attachment to the language and traditions of their community. Closely following this group is the third age group, which also shows a noticeable tendency to maintain Rusyn as the language of their dreams, suggesting that cultural preservation remains important as individuals age. In contrast, a significant number of respondents from the first two age groups—the youngest demographics—report uncertainty about the language in which they dream, with many unable to clearly identify whether their dreams occur in Rusyn or another language. This highlights a potential generational shift in the use of the Rusyn language, where younger individuals may be less conscious or less connected to their native language during subconscious activities like dreaming.

All 78 respondents answered the question of which language they dream in.

Specifically, 8 men (25.00%) stated that they dream in Rusyn, as did 18 women (39.13%). One man (3.00%) reported dreaming in Serbian, along with 2 women (4.35%). Furthermore, 6 men (18.75%) indicated that they dream in both Rusyn and Serbian, while 12 women (26.09%) gave the same response. Finally, 17 men (53.13%) and 14 women (30.43%) said they do not know in which language they dream. (Figure 8a and 8b)

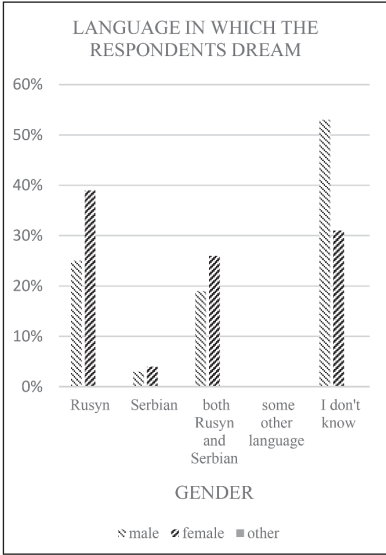


Figure 8a

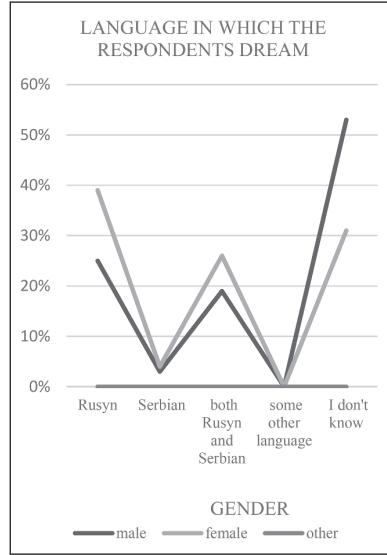


Figure 8b

Thus, the most frequent response given by men to this question was “I don’t know”, indicating a lack of clarity or awareness regarding the language in which they dream. This response was notably more common among men compared to women, suggesting that, for men, there may be less of a conscious connection to their native language during their dreams. On the other hand, women also frequently chose the “I don’t know” option, but to a lesser extent – 8.00% fewer women gave this response in comparison to the number of women who indicated that they dream in Rusyn. This finding highlights an interesting distinction between the genders: while both men and women are uncertain about the language of their dreams to some degree, women are more likely to retain a connection to their Rusyn identity, as reflected in the higher percentage of women who reported dreaming in Rusyn. This may suggest that, despite the uncertainty in some cases, Rusyn continues to play a more prominent role in the subconscious experiences of women than it does for men.

Relying on the scientific article by a group of eminent sociolinguists, «Language and Ethnobiological Skills Decline Precipitously in Papua New Guinea, the World’s most Linguistically Diverse Nation», which established an unexpectedly rapid decline in language skills among younger respondents compared to their parents, we decided to attempt drawing a similar parallel. However, due to the absence of speakers from the same family, we chose to make this comparison between speakers from the younger generation (the first group of speakers) and the generation that, based on age, would correspond to their parents’ generation (the third group of speakers). We calculated the difference in the use of the Rusyn

language between the first (ages 18–29) and the third (ages 45–59) age groups across four activities (Figure 9a and 9b).

Activity	First Group %	Third Group %	Difference (3rd – 1st)
Thinking	61.54%	65.00%	+3.46%
Counting	61.54%	78.95%	+17.41%
Praying	83.33%	68.42%	-14.91%
Dreaming	30.77%	40.00%	+9.23%

Figure 9a

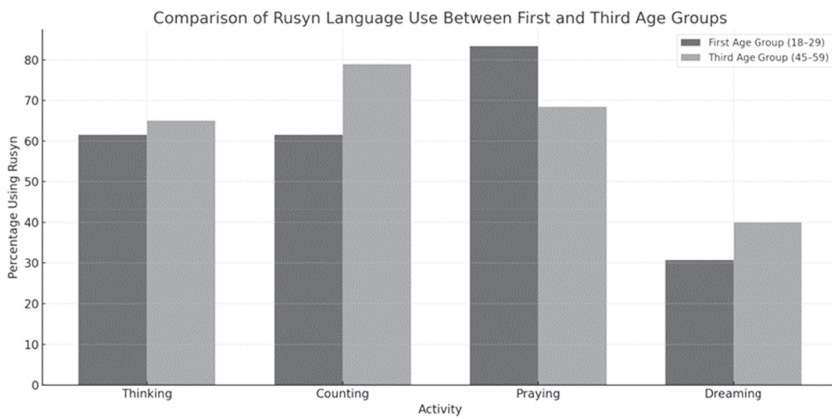


Figure 9b

Here's the visual comparison of Rusyn language use between the first (ages 18–29) and third (ages 45–59) age groups across four activities (Figure 9a and 9b): Rusyn usage increased with age in thinking, counting, and dreaming, especially in counting. However, younger speakers (18–29) reported more frequent use of Rusyn in prayer. The largest positive difference in favor of the third group is in counting (+17.41%). The largest negative difference (favoring the first group) is in prayer (-14.91%). It is possible that this difference stems from the fact that members of the younger generation may have less awareness regarding the language in which they pray. This could be due to a lack of experience or a limited familiarity with precise liturgical terminology – something that often develops with age and continued exposure to religious practices. Additionally, it is also plausible that some of them primarily engage in prayer privately, at home, rather than attending church services. In such cases, they may pray in Rusyn as part of their personal or family tradition, but without a direct connection to the formal liturgy, which could influence how they perceive and report the language of their religious expression.



## 7. Excerpts from the questionnaires (transcripts translated to English)

In further research, we incorporated several excerpts that illustrate particular cases of language use, highlighting patterns in code-switching and linguistic traits tied to social identity, region, or social class.

These excerpts offer tangible examples that help us back our descriptive analysis of language dynamics in society, anchoring the research in real-world language practices and enhancing its connection to the social influences involved.

Every questionnaire was applied in person and the interaction between the researcher and respondents was audio recorded. For this part of the paper, we chose three excerpts from the questionnaires that provide detailed answers to the four questions, which represent the main focus of the paper. Most of the questionnaires were filled out in Serbian by the researcher, while the respondents were the ones providing the answers. A few questionnaires were completed in Rusyn, with notes in another language, such as Slovak and Polish.

For this part of the study we chose three questionnaires completed in Serbian.

### Questionnaire extract 1

Researcher: What language do you think in?

Respondent: Well, that depends. Sometimes in Rusyn, sometimes in Serbian, but Serbian... I almost don't make a distinction between Serbian and Rusyn.

Researcher: Mhm.

Respondent: For me, it's very, how should I say, very... I mean, you can see that I speak Serbian fluently; I don't have any problems. I've read a lot. I've read all of world literature. Most of those books are in Serbian. Rusyns don't have that many books, but I read both Rusyn and Serbian, and they're very close to me; Serbian is very close to me. It's as close to me as Rusyn is.

Researcher: And in what language do you count when you count to yourself?

Respondent: Well, I can't really say, in both... It's very close to me, how can I tell you...

Researcher: Mhm. And in what language do you pray?

Respondent: Rusyn. Rusyns have Rusyn prayers, yes, they have the Lord's Prayer just like the Serbs. We are Greek Catholics. We were of the Orthodox faith, but Poles forced us in some historical period in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to accept the Pope as our supreme head, and then we had to acknowledge the Union, and our priests go to Rome to study. Our liturgy is the same as that of the Serbs; we have an Orthodox rite and Old Church Slavonic, right? The service is in Old Church Slavonic, so Orthodox faith is very close to us. When the Rusyns came here, if these others hadn't come, I don't know, the priests, we would all have returned to the Orthodox faith because there's no real difference. But anyway...

Researcher: Okay.

Respondent: But it's good for us that they came because we would have all blended in; we would all be Serbs now because when you switch to the Orthodox faith, it's over, right? So we are the link between Orthodox and Catholics.

Researcher: And in what language do you dream, do you know?

Respondent: I don't know, I don't know. I'm saying, Rusyn and Serbian are so close for me that I can't make a distinction. I know I'm Rusyn, so naturally, I speak Rusyn. My environment is Rusyn, and we speak Rusyn. We will never speak differently. Two Rusyns meeting will never speak Serbian; they will always speak Rusyn.

Researcher: Mhm, okay.

The respondent explains that they think in both Rusyn and Serbian, with no strong distinction between the two languages. They are fluent in Serbian, having read much of world literature in it, while Rusyn literature is more limited. Both languages are very close to them. The respondent also counts in both languages, though they find it difficult to choose one. When praying, they use Rusyn, as their Greek Catholic faith has Rusyn prayers and an Orthodox-like liturgy in Old Church Slavonic. The respondent also discusses the historical connection between Rusyns and Serbs, explaining that Rusyns would likely have blended into Serbian culture if not for their unique faith. They further state that, despite speaking Serbian fluently, Rusyns always speak Rusyn with one another.

### **Questionnaire extract 2**

Researcher: What language do you think in?

Respondent: Well, that's a nice question. Very convenient, interesting, and calculated, because it says, "You are the one who thinks in this language, and you belong to that people" – in Rusyn.

Researcher: And in what language do you count when you count to yourself?

Respondent: In Rusyn.

Researcher: And in what language do you pray?

Respondent: Well, in Old Church Slavonic and in Rusyn, depending on which prayer it is, because that's how we were taught (he recites the Lord's Prayer in Old Church Slavonic). That's Old Church Slavonic.

Researcher: So, can I say in another language?

Respondent: Well, is there Old Church Slavonic?

Researcher: No, but it just says "in another language".

Respondent: Ask me the question again.

(The researcher repeats the question and reads the provided answers.)

Respondent: Both in Rusyn and in another language.

Researcher: Okay. What language do you dream in?



Respondent: Oh, now you've caught me there.

Researcher: Why? (laughs)

Respondent: Like that. You've caught me there. Because I don't want to lie to you, and... Researcher: There's also the answer 'I don't know'.

Respondent: I have no idea what language I dream in. I don't know.

The respondent explains that they think in Rusyn, which they associate with their identity and people. When counting, they use Rusyn. For prayer, they alternate between Old Church Slavonic and Rusyn, depending on the specific prayer, as they were taught both languages. In response to the question about dreaming, the respondent admits uncertainty, saying they don't know what language they dream in.

### Questionnaire extract 3

Researcher: What language do you think in?

Respondent: Well, I think it's to a certain extent, right now I'd say in Rusyn, but it hasn't always been that way for me. Considering my education and the fact that I lived in a mixed environment where I was often in touch with the Serbian language, I used to think more in Serbian. But that has changed with university and my profession, so to speak.

Researcher: So the answer is now in Rusyn.

Respondent: Yes.

Researcher: And in what language do you count when you count to yourself?

Respondent: Well, in Rusyn, I think.

Researcher: And in what language do you pray?

Respondent: In Rusyn. Specifically, it's that Church Slavonic version, right? But...

Researcher: So, that means it's neither Serbian nor Rusyn; it's a Church Slavonic version. So, in another language.

Respondent: Well, yes. Actually, yes. Here in Krstur, I think, I don't know what answers you've received, but I believe they have versions of those prayers in Rusyn. But in Kula, where I learned, there aren't any. So, I use... how should I say it... that's what I learned, and it's something that's been automated for me, so I don't even know; it feels unusual. I mean, I understand it, but I don't use it in Rusyn.

Researcher: And in what language do you dream?

Respondent: Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't know how to say. I think it's possible to dream in both Rusyn and Serbian.

The respondent explains that they currently think in Rusyn, though they used to think in Serbian due to their education and mixed environment. This shift occurred during university and their professional life. They count in Rusyn and



pray in a version of Church Slavonic, which they were taught, though they also recognize there are Rusyn versions of prayers in some areas. The respondent is unsure which language they dream in but thinks it could be both Rusyn and Serbian.

The common themes across all three questionnaire extracts are:

All three respondents identify closely with both Rusyn and Serbian languages, often mentioning that they think, count, and pray in Rusyn, but also acknowledging their connection to Serbian and other languages (like Old Church Slavonic).

Each respondent experiences a fluid relationship between Rusyn and Serbian, with no strict separation between the two languages. They often use both depending on the context (e.g., praying, counting, etc.), and their language choice is influenced by their environment, education, and personal history.

All three respondents mention using Old Church Slavonic for religious practices, though they also recognize the Rusyn language as part of their religious and cultural identity.

When asked about the language in which they dream, all three respondents express uncertainty or a lack of clear distinction between languages.

Many of the reactions to the four questions about inner speech were laughter, especially regarding the last question (What language do you dream in?). Many of the respondents were unable to provide an answer to this fourth question, so they circled the option “I don’t know”.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

Analyzing the responses of 78 respondents, we reached the following conclusion: L1 (Rusyn) is more prevalent in the inner speech of bilingual and multilingual speakers of the Rusyn community in Vojvodina than L2 (Serbian), despite the fact that respondents live in a country where the official language is L2 (Serbian). This is evidenced by the following:

- Over 50% of respondents in each age group think in Rusyn (L1).
- Over 60% in each age group count in Rusyn (L1).
- Over 60% in each age group pray in Rusyn (L1).

As for dreams, in the first three age groups, the most common response was “I don’t know”, while in the fourth age group, nearly 50% of respondents dream in Rusyn (L1).

When discussing gender, both men and women predominantly think in Rusyn (almost 50% of men and over 70% of women), with the second most common response being both Rusyn and Serbian. Nearly 70% of men and over 70% of women count in Rusyn. Around 60% of men and over 80% of women pray in Rusyn. Over 50% of men do not know in which language they dream (the



most common response), followed closely by the Rusyn language. Almost 40% of women dream in Rusyn, and about 30% do not know in which language they dream.

Based on this research, we concluded that the most respondents express a strong connection to both languages, with Rusyn being central to their identity, but also acknowledge their fluency in Serbian. Most of them count and pray in Rusyn, though Old Church Slavonic is used in their religious practices, which adds another layer of linguistic complexity. When it comes to dreaming, the respondents are uncertain or unable to identify a specific language, suggesting that their experience with language is fluid and intertwined. In essence, their linguistic practices reflect a deep cultural and personal connection to both Rusyn and Serbian, shaped by their backgrounds and environments.

We've come to the conclusion that Rusyns in Vojvodina have a strong need for their Rusyn identity and for preserving it. They tend to maintain their language in inner speech (when they think, when they count to themselves, when they pray). When it comes to dreaming, we've concluded that men remember dreams less frequently than women (possibly due to the fact that maybe they remember their dreams less often than women, or that they are less likely to speak about them) and the research on this part could be expanded.

Based on the obtained data, we also may conclude that: Counting shows the greatest increase in Rusyn usage with age. Praying is the only activity where younger respondents use Rusyn more (here we need to pay attention to the above-mentioned special factors influencing language use during that activity). Dreaming and thinking show modest increases in the older group.

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### *Appendices*

- Appendix 1: *Language in which the respondents think, according to their age* (Figure 1a and 1b)
- Appendix 2: *Language in which the respondents think, according to their gender* (Figure 2a and 2b)
- Appendix 3: *Language in which the respondents count (to themselves), according to their age* (Figure 3a and 3b)
- Appendix 4: *Language in which the respondents count (to themselves), according to their gender* (Figure 4a and 4b)
- Appendix 5: *Language in which the respondents pray, according to their age* (Figure 5a and 5b)
- Appendix 6: *Language in which the respondents pray, according to their gender* (Figure 6a and 6b)
- Appendix 7: *Language in which the respondents dream, according to their age* (Figure 7a and 7b)
- Appendix 8: *Language in which the respondents dream, according to their gender* (Figure 8a and 8b)
- Appendix 9: *The difference in use of the Rusyn language between the first (ages 18–29) and third (ages 45–59) age groups across four activities* (Figure 9a and 9b)

УПОТРЕБА РУСИНСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА КОД БИЛИНГВАЛНИХ/  
МУЛТИЛИНГВАЛНИХ ГОВОРНИКА РУСИНСКЕ ЗАЈЕДНИЦЕ  
У ВОЈВОДИНИ (СРБИЈА) У УНУТРАШЊЕМ ГОВОРУ

Резиме

Тема рада је употреба русинског језика међу билингвалним/мултилингвалним говорницима из Србије (у Војводини: Руски Крстур, Куцура, Нови Сад) током унутрашњег говора – размишљања, бројања, молитви и снова. У истраживању је коришћен социолингвистички упитник. Упитник је попунило 78 испитаника (билингвалних/мултилингвалних говорника из русинске заједнице). Уз свако питање у упитнику били су понуђени одговори, а испитаници су заокружили онај који најбоље одражава њихову језичку употребу у одговарајућој ситуацији (одговори су, на пример, русински, српски, оба језика једнако, или неки други језик). Приликом анализе одговора, узети су у обзир следећи параметри: повезаност демографских, као и језичких варијабли, са употребом језика при унутрашњем говору. Истраживање је показало да Русини имају снажну потребу за очувањем свог русинског идентитета. Они често употребљавају русински језик у унутрашњем говору (када размишљају, када броје за себе, када се моле). Када је реч о сновима, закључили смо да мушкарци ређе од жена памте на ком језику сањају, а истраживање би у овом делу могло бити проширено. Између најмлађе генерације Русина у истраживању и генерације која би према годинама одговарала генерацији њихових родитеља постоји благи пад у употреби русинског током три активности (размишљање, бројање у себи и снови), а пораст када су у питању молитве.

*Кључне речи:* русински језик, русинска заједница, билингвални/мултилингвални говорници, Војводина, унутрашњи говор