Vorbarĭ Rumînĭesk: The Vlach on line Dictionary

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1. Language context

The Vlachs (*Vlasi*, as they call themselves when speaking Serbian, or *rumâń*, which is the ethnonym they use for self-identification when speaking their mother tongue) are one of the three main Romanian speaking communities on the territory of Serbia, apart from the Romanians of Vojvodina and the Bayash or Rudari, spread all over the country[1]. They inhabit more than 100 villages in the North-Eastern part of Serbia, along the state border with Romania and Bulgaria, and speak an archaic variant of Daco-Romanian, with a great share of neologisms from the contact Serbian language. Almost all of them are bilingual, with only a few exceptions in the very old or very young generations, which speak either only Romanian, or only Serbian. The Vlachs do not use their native vernaculars as a written language, as they are exclusively schooled in Serbian, nor do they have a tradition of literacy in their native dialect.

From a strictly linguistic and genealogic point of view, the Vlach cannot be called a language of its own, as it does not represent, at any level, an autonomous linguistic unity: it is an archaic, dialectal, but still living variant of the Romanian language. The same holds true for the Bayash speeches of Serbia, which

> cannot be considered as constituting a language separate from Romanian, since they have preserved the crucial features (syntactic and morphological) of the Romanian language, the most important changes occurring in the lexicon, because of the need to borrow new words (Sorescu-Marinković 2011: 20).

Nevertheless, this perspective might change in respect to the definition of language and languageness, for it must not be forgotten that language is not (entirely) a linguistic phenomenon, but a social and political one. The recent split of the Serbo-Croatian language in four different languages – Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin –, even if the same subdialect of Shtokavian is the basis of all four of them, is a good example in this respect: even if they all are mutually intelligible and constitute a single language by a purely linguistic criterion, they are,

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[1] For more details on the Romanian speaking communities in Serbia, see Sorescu-Marinković 2007 and Sikimić 2012.

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however, distinct national standards. Since a 'standard language' can act as a symbol of independence, many groups are keen to keep their language separate from others, despite being practically identical.

If we take Romanian and its varieties, we might mention the example of the Bayash vernaculars from Hungary, which are today a standardized language. Even if they are archaic variants of the Romanian language, with a strong influence of the contact Hungarian language, the Bayash do not have a Romanian national identity, thus the adoption of the standard Romanian (already in use with the Romanian minority from Hungary) did not seem acceptable to them. The use of a certain language and the feeling of belonging to a nation do not always run together.

As linguistics is a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive discipline, and in order to avoid any biases, we shall refer to the Vlach vernaculars not as the "Vlach language" nor as "Romanian dialects", but as the "Vlach variety of the Romanian language". The Vlach variety of the Romanian language can be considered heritage language, following the widely accepted definition by Valdes (2000) that a heritage language is a language which is acquired by individuals raised in homes where the dominant language of the region is not spoken or not exclusively spoken. A heritage language is typically acquired before a dominant language, but is not completely acquired because of the individual's switch to that dominant language (Polinsky/ Kagan 2007).

2. Attempts at standardizing the Vlach variety

The Vlach variety lacks a substantial record of previous documentation. The researchers who studied this region documented mainly traditional speech genres (Vâlsan 1913 /2001/, Petrovici 1942), and not so much the spoken everyday language. Before WWI, the Romanian linguist George Vâlsan, after field researches in the area, established that the Vlachs speak two different dialects of the Romanian language: the Bănăţean dialect and the Muntean one (Vâlsan 1913 /2001/: 266). Recent ethnolinguistic researches (Durlić 2010, Petrović 2005, Sikimić 2005, Sorescu-Marinković 2006) nuanced the findings of Vâlsan, ascertaining that the Vlachs belong to four dialectal groups: *Ţăranii, Ungurenii, Ungurenii-Munteni* and *Bufanii*. *Ungurenii* inhabit mainly the regions of Braničevo, Stig, Zvižd, Mlava, Resava and Homolje, and speak a dialect which is closely connected to the Bănăţean dialect of the Romanian language; the speech of *Ţărani*, living in Ključ and Krajina regions, resemble the Muntean dialect; while the mixtures between *Ungureni* and *Ţărani* gave rise to a transition dialect, that of the *Ungureni-Munteni*. *Bufanii* are a distinct population group, the most recent settlers from Romania, who today live only in the town of Majdanpek and have been almost completely assimilated by the most numerous *Ungureni*, as far as their native vernacular is concerned (Sikimić 2005: 149, Sorescu-Marinković 2009: 189–190).

The preparations for the field researches for the Romanian Linguistic Atlas – region Morava, Danube, Timok (ALR – MDT) started more than seven years ago. ALR – MDT is meant to be a regional atlas of the Romanian language, similar to other atlases from the series, which depict dialects spoken on the territory of Romania. The recordings are supposed to be carried out in 60 localities, with the help of a questionnaire comprising 1,111 questions (Neiescu/ Beltechi/ Mocanu 2006).

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Until now, serious linguistic research in the area was sporadic, and the bulk of the documentary linguistic and ethnographic material remained unpublished, in the archives of various institutions or individuals. There have been attempts at issuing periodicals in the Vlach variety, but they have failed in the long run. The visitors of several Vlach forums use their native vernaculars, most of whom transliterate them with the help of the Cyrillic alphabet, but there are no standards. Ljubiša lu Boža Kići, member of the Vlach community and amateur linguist, compiled a Vlach-Serbian and Serbian-Vlach dictionary (Vlach Dictionary 2004) and translated the Bible into Vlach (Vlach Bible 2006), on the basis of his personal system of transcription for the Vlach variety which combines Cyrillic, Latin and special characters.

In spite of the lack of documentation about the Vlach variety, the standardization of the Vlach language is currently taking place, a process accompanied by intense debates, partly due to the fragmentation of the Vlach community, and partly to the delicate political context[2]. On December 8th 2011, the National Council of the Vlachs unanimously adopted the *Proposal for the Vlach writing*, developed by the Association "Gergina" from Negotin (Proposal 2011). According to the *Proposal…*, the "Vlach language is the term used for archaic Roman dialects which the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia speak as their mother tongue". Further, the document claims that,

> despite the fact that the language of the Vlachs of Serbia is an idiom (dialect) which resulted from the Balkan Latinity, partly from Romanian and partly with influences from non-Romance languages, it is specific enough to be considered the mother tongue of the Vlachs.

The authors of the *Proposal…* also mention the fact that the Vlach language is comprised of two dialects: that spoken in the Homoljsko-Braničevsko district and the one from the Krajinsko-Timočko region.

The document states that the adoption of the Vlach system of writing is a "priority and urgent task", as it represents "the pinnacle and foundation of literacy and language preservation". As its authors suggest, the Vlach writing must be based on well known graphical solutions, namely on the equal use of the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, and must correspond to the linguistic and phonetic features of the Vlach language. Thus, two systems of writing were adopted: the Cyrillic and the Latin one, both based on phonetic principles. The Cyrillic Vlach writing comprises 34 monographemes (from the Serbian Cyrillic) and one digrapheme, *dz*. The Latin Vlach writing comprises 31 monographemes and four digraphemes: *dž, lj, nj* and *dz*; the additional vowels, apart from the Serbian ones (*a, e, i, o, u*), for both dialectal

[2] On February 28th 2012, Romania forced a delay of Serbia being granted the candidate country status to the European Union membership, following a dramatic meeting of the EU foreign ministers in Brussels. Bucharest insisted that before getting the candidate country status, Serbia had to improve the situation of the Vlach minority. Romania's stance was criticized by the German Foreign Minister, but also by the leader of the Vlach National Council in Serbia, Radiša Dragojević, who said that only a small group of Vlachs consider themselves Romanians and asked for Romania's help and that Romania had no right in giving ultimatums to Serbia. After the signing of a bilateral agreement at the ambassadorial level, providing for the better protection for the Vlach minority in Serbia, Serbia was granted full candidate country status on March 1st.

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areas, are *ă* and *î*, while the additional consonants, characteristic only for the Homoljsko-Braničevsko dialect, are *dz, ś* and *ź*.

3. The Vlach on line dictionary (VOD)

Concurrently with the official attempts at standardization of the Vlach language, another lexicographic project started in mid-2011: the compilation of *Vorbarĭ rumînńesk*, the Vlach on line dictionary (VOD). As opposed to the standardization of the Vlach language, which was carried out at institutional level, VOD is a personal pilot project, designed and administered by the enthusiastic Vlach ethnologist Paun Es Durlić, without any institutional or political support. VOD was announced in the *Compendium for the introduction of Vlach in primary schools* (Durlić 2011), a manifest and proposal for the preservation and revival of the mother tongue of the Vlachs, and is being created according to the principles explained there in detail by its author.

3.1. The *Compendium*

As Durlić says in the *Compendium...*, by all ethnographic features (language, beliefs, customs, material culture etc.), "the Vlachs are part of the Romanian people, as follows: the Eastern Vlachs, the so-called *Ţărani*, belong to the *Olteni* group, while both *Ungureni* groups belong to the *Bănăţeni*" (*idem*: 1). Further, Durlić asserts that the "Vlach language" is a language only in the ethno-historical context, while linguistically it is comprised of two dialects of the Romanian language: Western Vlachs speak the Bănăţean dialect and Eastern Vlachs the Oltean dialect. As the Romanian literary language was created in the 19th century on the basis of the Muntean dialect and this process did not involve the Vlachs, they "sense" it as a foreign language, considering only its above-mentioned dialects as their mother tongue. The author goes on to define the "Vlach language": "the Serbian popular name for the dialects of the Romanian language which the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia speak as their mother tongue" (*idem*: 2). As far as the ethnic identity of the Vlachs is concerned, Durlić classifies nowadays Vlachs in the group of peoples with a so-called double identity, where one can distinguish three levels: ethnic instinct, ethnic consciousness and national consciousness. Thus, according to the ethnic instinct and ethnic consciousness, the Vlachs belong to the Romanian people, but according to the national consciousness, they are Serbs. Or more picturesquely said, as the author of the *Compendium...* conveys it,

> the contemporary Vlachs are Romanians on two «floors» and Serbians at the third one, the "roof floor", which means that the Vlachs do not have a Romanian national consciousness, because it – like any other national consciousness – is formed during complex historical processes (*idem*: 2)[3].

The author thinks the specific ethnic mimicry of the Vlachs is the reason why the results of population censuses from Serbia are never precise as far as the number of Vlachs is concerned.

[3] It is important to note that the famous Romanian geographer George Vâlsan, almost a century ago, noted the lack of Romanian national counsciousness among the Vlachs, which was however counterbalanced by a strong ethnical instinct (Vâlsan 1913 /2001/: 85).

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Durlić also believes that the Vlach dialects are almost obsolete and cannot be revived by the standard Romanian language, as the former National Council of the Vlachs proposed, nor by transforming them in an official language, as the new Council expects. Instead, he suggests a model of language reviving, with two main aims: 1) to create a favorable atmosphere for overcoming the huge gap between generations, so they continue to use the Vlach dialects as part of their ethnic intimacy, and 2) to get the young Vlachs acquainted with Romanian literary language, which is, in methodological terms, a partially foreign language for them. Durlić also proposes an educational model and a learning dynamics for pupils in primary schools, also advocating the use of the two alphabets the Vlachs are familiar with: the Cyrillic and Latin one, with slight modifications. As said in the *Compendium…*, he intended the VOD to be a useful learning tool for the Vlachs who get familiar with their dialects and with the Romanian language.

3.2. The structure of VOD

VOD is hosted on the personal website of its initiator and administrator, Paun Es Durlić, www.paundurlic.com, and its homepage looks like this:

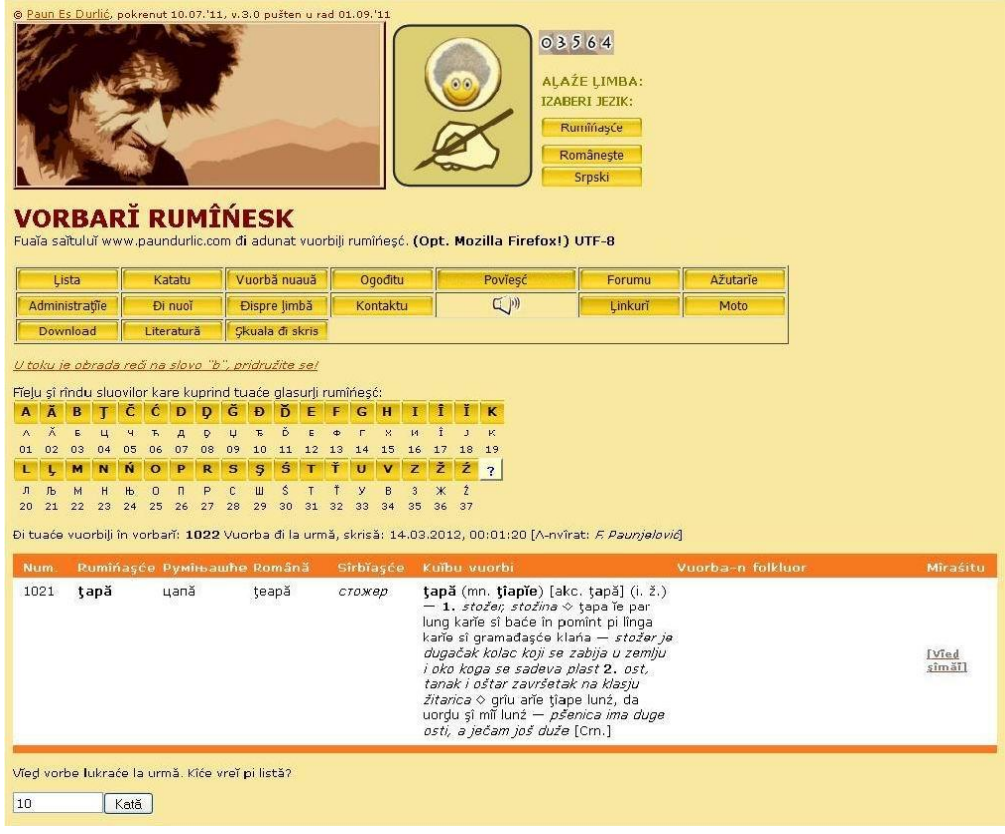


Figure 1. The homepage of the Vlach on-line dictionary
(http://www.paundurlic.com/vlaski.recnik/)

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The image on the homepage is a portrait of the administrator's grandfather, which, as he confesses, reminds him that he has the moral duty to preserve the language legacy that was handed to him. The emoticon at the right side of the portrait is the trademark of VOD, created by Durlić alone, and the slogan that usually goes with the sign reads: "Vlaĭku rumînu skriĭaşće rumîńaşće!" ("The Vlach Romanian writes in Romanian!").

VOD offers the possibility of changing the language interface: *Rumîńaşće* (Vlach), *Românește* (Romanian) and *Српски* (Serbian). There are 17 available options: *Listing, Search, New word, Corrections, Folk literature, Forum, Help, Administration, About us, About the language, Contact, Pronounciation, Links, Motto, Download, Literature* and *Writing school*.

The first option, *Listing*, offers the visitors of the site the possibility to list the existing words by: Latin Vlach, Cyrillic Vlach, Serbian translation, their usage in proverbs, illustrated words, the name of the contributor who entered the word, the village where the word was collected, number of visits for one word, as well as a printable form of the dictionary.

The option *Search*, apart from offering the possibility to query the lexicon database by word, prefix, suffix, the Romanian or Serbian translation of the word, number of the word or geographical region, also comprises interactive maps which offer the visitors the possibility to query the lexicographic material by clicking on the regions on the map.

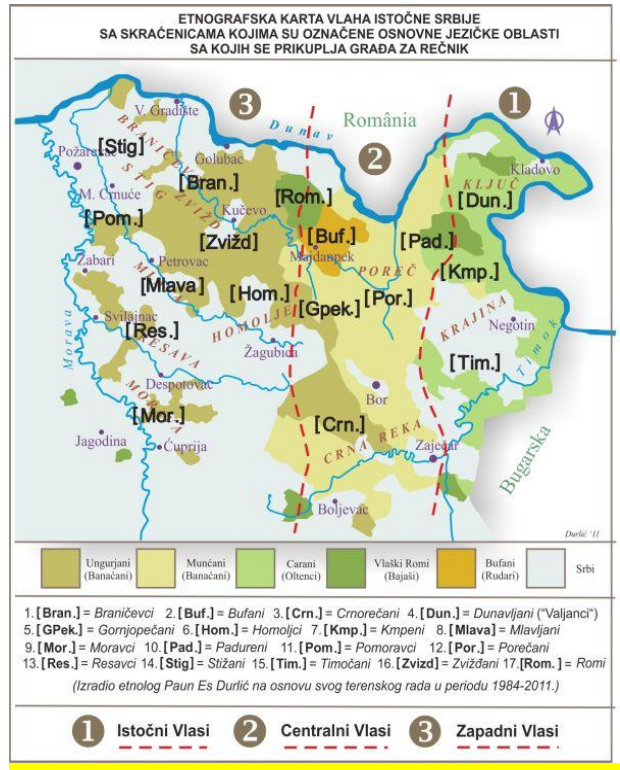


Figure 2. Interactive map of the regions inhabited by Vlachs and of the Vlach groups (http://www.paundurlic.com/vlaski.recnik/pretraga.php)

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The author categorizes the Vlachs, according to the geographical areas of North-Eastern Serbia they inhabit, into three main groups: 1) Eastern, 2) Central and 3) Western Vlachs. The linguistic groups presented on the map are: *Ungureni (Bănăţeni)* Vlachs, *Munteni (Bănăţeni)* Vlachs, *Ţărani (Olteni)* Vlachs, *Bufani* Vlachs, Bayash (Romanian speaking Roma) and Serbs. By clicking on one of the 17 sub-regions on the map, one gets more detailed micro-maps, with further categorizations of the Vlachs (as we can see from Figure 3 – *Pădureni, Câmpeni, Timoceni*, for example, in the Negotinska krajina and Timok regions), a complete network of settlements, and the possibility to click on them and to visualize the entire lexicographic material collected there or connected with that particular place (see Figure 4).



Figure 3. Detailed interactive map of the Negotinska krajina and Timok regions
(http://www.paundurlic.com/vlaski.recnik/mapa-timoceni.php)

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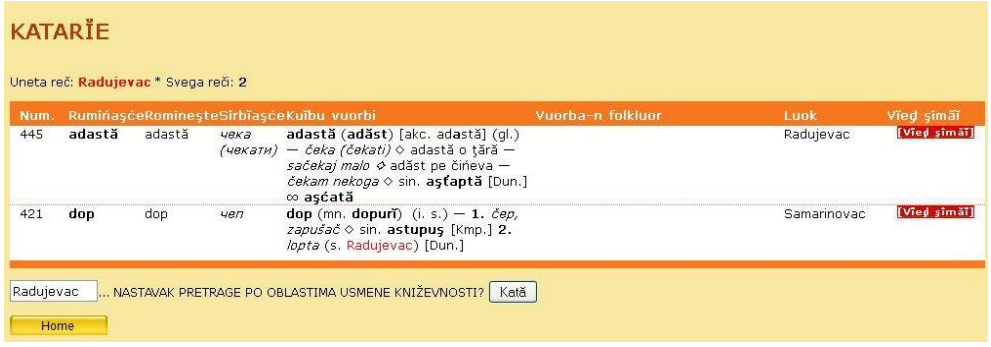


Figure 4. Lexicographic material collected in or connected to the village of Radujevac
(http://www.paundurlic.com/vlaski.recnik/pretraga_rez_mapa.php?uneta_rec=Radujevac)

In the *Folk literature* option, we can find entire texts belonging to different domains of the folk literature, accompanied by the categorization of the texts, Vlach original title and Serbian translation, the comment of the author regarding various aspects of the folk creation and, in some cases, the original audio recording of the text.

Another interesting feature is the *Pronunciation* option, which offers the visitor the possibility to listen to the phonetic reproduction of lexemes or of entire folk texts.

On the homepage there are listed the letters of the Vlach alphabet, as Durlić conceived it, in both Latin and Cyrillic variants, although prevalence is given to Latin. As for the Latin Vlach alphabet, it is a mixture of Serbian Latin characters (*č, ć, đ, ž*), Romanian letters (*ă, î, ş, ţ*), as well as other special characters, belonging to the international phonetic transcription system (*ğ, ḑ, ď, ľ, ļ, ń, ś, ť, ź*). The Cyrillic Vlach alphabet contains, apart from the Cyrillic characters characteristic of the Serbian language, Latin characters from the Romanian language (*ă, î*), as well as from the international system of phonetic transcription (*ḑ, ď, ś, ť, ź*). These last characters were introduced in the newly formed Vlach alphabet out of the need to cover all the Vlach sounds, which do not exist in the Serbian pronunciation, or in the Romanian standard, being characteristic only to some dialects (see, for example, the palatalized consonants).

On the home page of VOD there is also presented the last entry in the dictionary, as well as number of entries compiled so far.

Each entry is introduced in Vlach, translated into Romanian and Serbian, explained in Vlach and in Serbian, exemplified through samples of free speech or as it appears in folk creations, according to the following model:

(01) Main entry
(01.1) Vlach word
(01.2) Romanian translation
(01.3) Serbian translation
(02) "Word nest"
(02.1) Vlach word singular
(02.2) Vlach word plural
(02.3) Vlach word with marked accents
(02.4) Grammatical determinants (part of speech etc.)

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(02.5) Word explanation in Serbian
(02.6) Use of the word in expressions/idioms
(02.7) Translation of the idiom in Serbian
(02.8) The region the word was collected
(02.9) Lexical variants with other Vlach groups
(03) Other elements: village, region, sub-region, for what domain of culture the word is characteristic, collector (author), literature, images, notes etc.

Examples:

Nouns:

brĭazdă (mn. **brîăžđ**) [akc. brĭ**a**zdă] (i. ž.) — **1**. *brazda, udubljenje koje plug ostavlja na površini zemlje pri oranju* ◊ kînd arĭ ku vićiļi, şî kînd plugu-ţ sîare đin brĭazdă, kî ĭe pomîntu tare, loko-la ńiarat în fundu brîažđi, sa kĭamă pîrś — *kad oreš stokom, i kad ti plug iskoči iz brazde zbog tvrde zemlje, onaj nepoorani deo na dnu brazde zove se jarac* **2**. dugačak i uzan traga iza nekog predmeta koji se kretao ili koji je vučen ◊ a trĭekut kare a fi trĭekt ku saĭna pin namĭeţ, ş-a ramas brîăžđ adînś dupa ĭel — *neko je prošao sankama kroz smetove, i ostavio duboke brazde za sobom* ◊ (demin.) **brĭazduţă**, **brĭezduļeţ** ◊ (augm.) **brĭazduoń** ◊ sin. **şîrag** [Por.]

Verbs:

brăzdui (**brăzduĭaşće**, **brăzduĭesk**) [akc. brăzdu**i**] (gl. p.) — *brazdati, povlačiti brazdu, orati* ◊ pomîntu ĭe tare ka pĭatra, no sî sa puată brăzdui ļesńe — *zemlja je tvrda kao kamen, neće moži lako da se izbrazda* [Por.] ∞ **brĭazdă**

Pronouns:

ăăla (**aĭa**) (mn. **ăăĭa**, **ăăļa**) [akc. a**ă**la] (zam.) — *onaj, ono; taj* ◊ ăăla uom — *onaj čovek* ◊ ăăla kopil — *ono dete* ◊ aĭa muĭarĭe — *ona žena* ◊ ăăļa muĭerĭ — *one žene* [Por.] dij. var. **ăla** (**aĭa**) (mn. **ăĭa**, **ăļa**) [akc. **ă**la (**a**ĭa)] [Kmp.]

Adjectives:

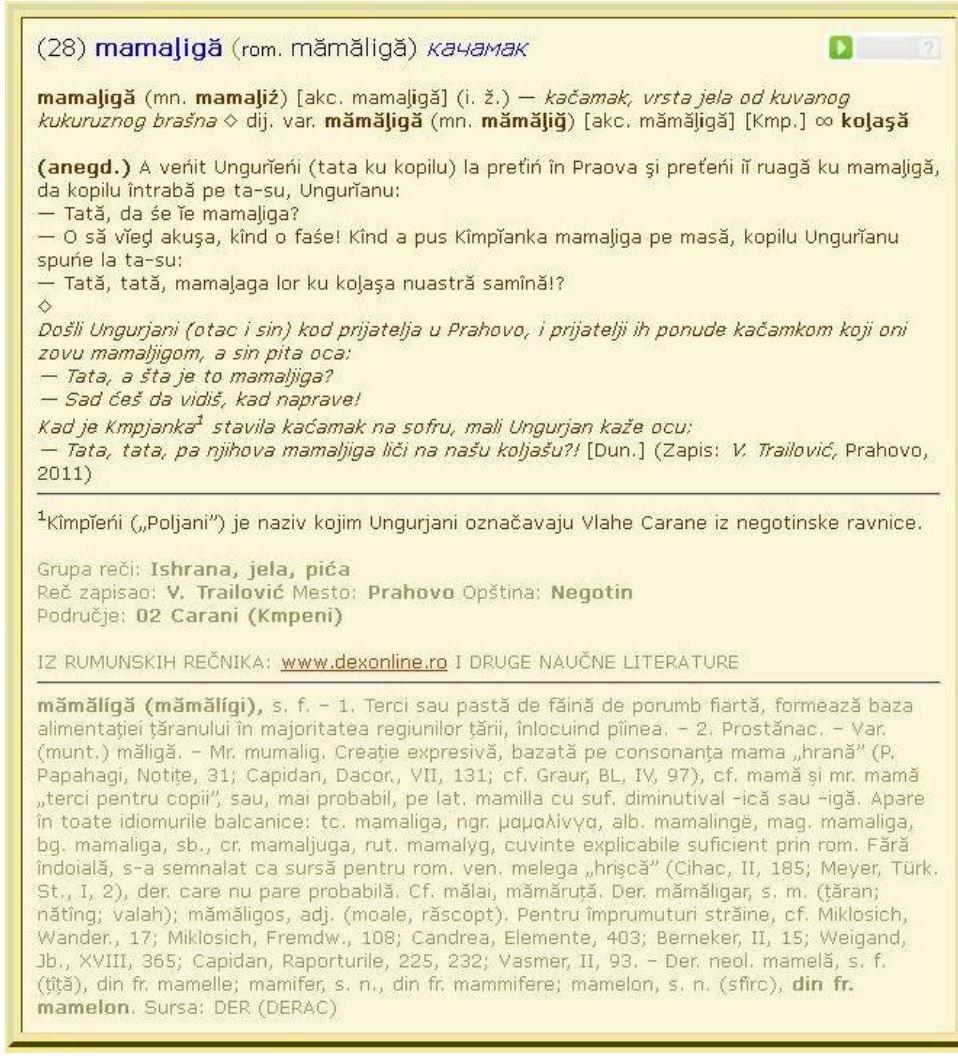
adînk (**adînkă**) (mn. **adînś**, **adînśe**) [akc. adî**n**k] (prid.) — *dubok, udubljen* ◊ apă adînkă — *duboka voda* ◊ padurĭe adînkă — *gusta i velika šuma* ◊ vaļe adînkă — *duboka dolina* ◊ suomn adînk — *dubok san* ◊ var. **adînśuos** (mn. **adînśuasă**) [akc. adînśu**o**s] [Por.] dij. var. **adînk (adînkă)** (mn. **adînč**, **adînče**) [akc. adî**n**k] [Kmp.] **(posl.)** Ku bîtu skurt nu sa masură apa adînkă. — *Kratkim štapom ne meri se duboka voda*. (Rudna Glava, zapis: *Durlić*) [Por.]

3.3. How is VOD being created

As Durlić metaphorically says on the VOD site, "this dictionary, named *vorbarĭ* in the spirit of the Vlach people's speech, is the initiative of an ethnologist, Vlach by origin, together with a group of enthusiasts, who bare handed take the Vlach words out of the language ruins, carefully examine what memories their last whisper brings to the people, and watchfully arrange them in the open treasury of the Vlach spiritual culture, which until now has been mysterious and unknown, but today is open to each of us on the Internet, and available to everyone!". Among the people involved with the creation of VOD there are, first of all, many engaged participants from the Vlach community, who introduce in the dictionary words from their villages of origin; then, there are the researchers who act as consultants in linguistic issues; and, finally, there is the creator and administrator of VOD, also a

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community member, ethnologist and programmer, under whose supervision the lexicon is being created. The documentation database for VOD is represented by samples of free speech from the members of the community, registered users, who exemplify different entries in the dictionary with lexemes from their own local dialect, and by a corpus of audio recordings, made during ethnological field researchers and belonging to the initiator and administrator of the site.



(28) **mamaḷigă** (rom. mămăligă) *качамак*

mamaḷigă (mn. **mamaḷiź**) [akc. mamaḷigă] (i. ž.) — *kačamak, vrsta jela od kuvanog kukuruznog brašna* ◇ dij. var. **mămăḷigă** (mn. **mămăḷiğ**) [akc. mămăḷigă] [Kmp.] ∞ **koḷaşă**

(anegd.) A veńit Unguřieńi (tata ku kopilu) la preťiń în Praova şi preťeńi iř ruagă ku mamaḷigă, da kopilu întrabă pe ta-su, Unguřianu:
— Tată, da śe îe mamaḷiga?
— O să vîeḑ akuşa, kînd o faśe! Kînd a pus Kîmpîanka mamaḷiga pe masă, kopilu Unguřianu spuńe la ta-su:
— Tată, tată, mamaḷaga lor ku koḷaşa nuastră samînă!?
◇
Došli Ungurjani (otac i sin) kod prijatelja u Prahovo, i prijatelji ih ponude kačamkom koji oni zovu mamaljigom, a sin pita oca:
— Tata, a šta je to mamaljiga?
— Sad ćeš da vidiš, kad naprave!
Kad je Kmpjanka[1] stavila kačamak na sofru, mali Ungurjan kaže ocu:
— Tata, tata, pa njihova mamaljiga liči na našu koljašu?! [Dun.] (Zapis: *V. Trailović,* Prahovo, 2011)

[1]Kîmpîeńi („Poljani") je naziv kojim Ungurjani označavaju Vlahe Carane iz negotinske ravnice.

Grupa reči: **Ishrana, jela, pića**
Reč zapisao: **V. Trailović** Mesto: **Prahovo** Opština: **Negotin**
Područje: **02 Carani (Kmpeni)**

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mămălígă (mămălígi), s. f. – 1. Terci sau pastă de făină de porumb fiartă, formează baza alimentației țăranului în majoritatea regiunilor țării, înlocuind pîinea. – 2. Prostănac. – Var. (munt.) măligă. – Mr. mumalig. Creație expresivă, bazată pe consonanța mama „hrană" (P. Papahagi, Notițe, 31; Capidan, Dacor., VII, 131; cf. Graur, BL, IV, 97), cf. mamă și mr. mamă „terci pentru copii", sau, mai probabil, pe lat. mamilla cu suf. diminutival -ică sau -igă. Apare în toate idiomurile balcanice: tc. mamaliga, ngr. μαμαλίγα, alb. mamalingë, mag. mamaliga, bg. mamaliga, sb., cr. mamaljuga, rut. mamałyg, cuvinte explicabile suficient prin rom. Fără îndoială, s-a semnalat ca sursă pentru rom. ven. melega „hrișcă" (Cihac, II, 185; Meyer, Türk. St., I, 2), der. care nu pare probabilă. Cf. mălai, mămăruță. Der. mămăligar, s. m. (țăran; nătîng; valah); mămăligos, adj. (moale, răscopt). Pentru împrumuturi străine, cf. Miklosich, Wander., 17; Miklosich, Fremdw., 108; Candrea, Elemente, 403; Berneker, II, 15; Weigand, Jb., XVIII, 365; Capidan, Raporturile, 225, 232; Vasmer, II, 93. – Der. neol. mamelă, s. f. (țîță), din fr. mamelle; mamifer, s. n., din fr. mammifere; mamelon, s. n. (sîrc), **din fr. mamelon**. Sursa: DER (DERAC)

Figure 5. Example of entry in VOD, *palenta*
(http://www.paundurlic.com/vlaski.recnik/celarec.php?action=upd&id=28)

3.4. The dynamics of VOD

The compilation of the dictionary started in mid-2011 and by November 13th 2011 there were 500 words compiled in it, while the number of visitors reached 1,300 (the main visitor counter of the dictionary is designed to count only the first

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visit of a visitor). By December 1st 2011, the dictionary comprised 630 entries, and by the beginning of February 2012, it reached 1,000 entries. After this date, VOD stagnated, probably due to the political situation, thus in the beginning of March 2012, VOD had almost the same number of entries, like in the beginning of February.

Figure 6 presents the ethnolinguistic map of North-Eastern Serbia with the localities where the language material for VOD was collected, and it reflects the exact situation on December 1st 2011. The figure in brackets, following the name of the locality, indicates the number of words collected in that particular place.

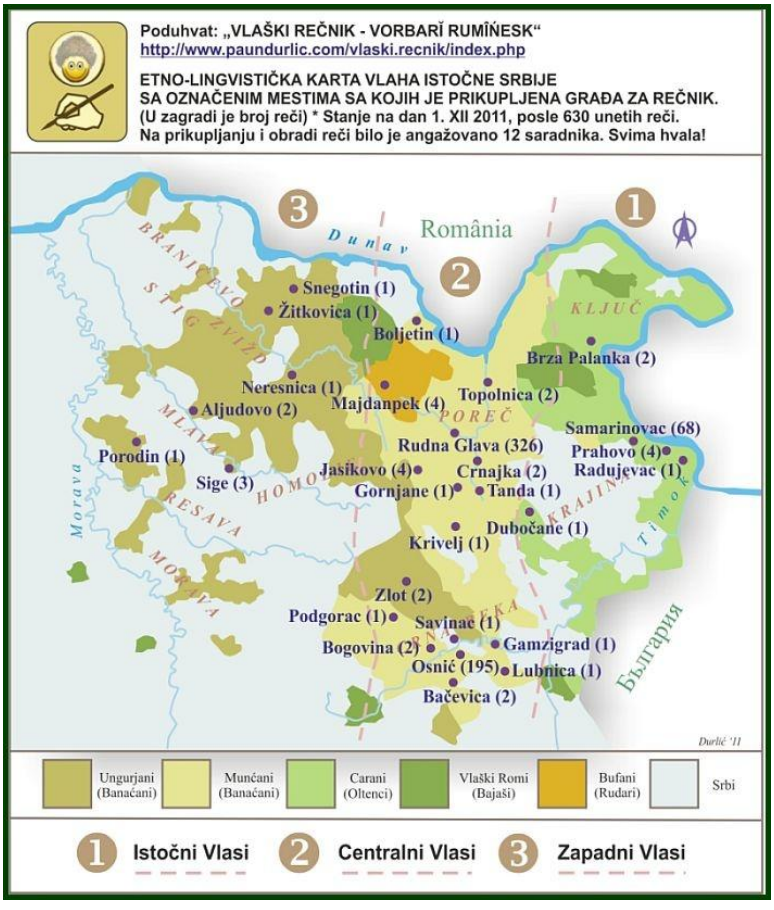


Figure 6. Ethnolinguistic map of the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia, presenting the situation of VOD on December 1st 2011, after 630 compiled entries
(http://www.paundurlic.com/forum.vlasi.srbije/index.php?topic=1146.0)

4. Discussion and conclusions

The main aims of VOD are lexical acquisition (it should enable the members of the community to introduce words in it) and language revitalization (it is meant to revive the Vlach variant and to transform it into a language widely spoken, not restricted to the family circle). As we can see from a distance of less than a year

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from its launching, this lexicographic project materialized in the creation of a "documentation dictionary" rather than a "maintenance (or learner) dictionary", documenting both language and culture. Even if dictionaries of endangered or unwritten languages or dialects are sometimes necessarily simplistic, mere word lists (Garret 2011: 416), VOD is meant to be an encyclopedia of the Vlach culture, documenting also cultural knowledge, apart from the linguistic one. Lexicography in and for speech communities without a tradition of literacy in their native dialect differs quite substantially from conventional models of lexicography, the result being an ethnographic "documentation dictionary" which "has not only become an essential, but also an integral part of language documentation" (Cablitz 2011: 446). VOD also aims at producing printable explanatory dictionaries (Romanian–Vlach, Vlach–Romanian, Serbian–Vlach, Vlach–Serbian), thematic dictionaries or author/regional dictionaries (according to the entries compiled by particular collaborators). Last but not least, as the creation of VOD is going on concurrently with the intensely debated standardization of the Vlach language, VOD's aim might be to show that the Vlach variety already has a written form and an alphabet, whose viability has already been tested and proved by its many collaborators and by the visitors of its Forum. In other words, this means that VOD is more than a descriptive lexicon – it is meant to be, even if not at a rhetorical level, a prescriptive tool for future language standardization.

In many traditional lexicographical projects, there is a sharp distinction between scholarly researchers, whose findings determine the content of a grammar or a dictionary, and the users of the dictionary. With VOD, things are quite different: this is a dictionary by and for the members of the Vlach community, the linguists being here mere consultants. Here, the stakeholders are, in their vast majority, community members who wish to take issue with definitions of plant or animal terms, based on the usage in their own families. As Garrett said about Yurok, an endangered language of North America, "the quality of documentary products is improved if such users are involved with analytic decisions, and if they have the ability to interpret the underlying data themselves" (Garret 2011: 408).

Another issue which must be addressed is that of the use of both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets for writing the Vlach variety. Even if in an initial phase the author of the site advocated the use of both alphabets, later he removed the button which allowed for changing the language interface to Vlach Cyrillic. On the VOD site there are still the letters meant to form the Vlach Cyrillic writing, but almost all the entries are in Vlach Latin only. As it is known, Serbian is the only European language with active digraphia, using both Cyrillic and Latin alphabet; adopting both systems of writing for the Vlach variety would transform Vlach into the second digraphic language variety in Europe. Strange as it may seem, for Vlach is a dialect of a Romance language, unrelated structurally with the Slavic languages, for many Vlachs, like for many Serbians, the Cyrillic alphabet might be easier to read, because in Serbia the Cyrillic writing is acquired before the Latin one.

Last but not least, we must say that VOD is an extraordinary enterprise, which, when finished, will offer a complete picture of the Vlach linguistic variety, invaluable both for the Romanian linguistics, and for the Vlach community, and of the Vlach culture in general. So far, in a few months, the lexicon has covered entries

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for the first two letters of the alphabet. As VOD is the result of the initiative and vision of a single stakeholder and of the effort of a few enthusiastic members of the community, with no institutional or financial support, we can only hope it will find the necessary resources to get finished.

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Abstract

This paper presents the lexicographic project of the Vlach on line dictionary (VOD), meant to revive the mother tongue of the Vlach community of North-Eastern Serbia. For the beginning, the author defines the Vlach linguistic variety, which, from a linguistic and genealogic perspective, is not a separate language, but a bundle of Romanian speeches spoken in the region, and addresses the question of the debated standardization of the "Vlach language", which is currently going on in Serbia. Then, she analyses in detail the structure of VOD, its main features, options, dynamics etc. The author pays a great attention to the way in which VOD is being created, namely by the members of the Vlach community, under the supervision of an ethnologist, also Vlach, who are involved with the analytic decisions and interpret the underlying data themselves. The result of the VOD project seems to be the creation of an ethnographic "documentation dictionary", which documents both Vlach language and culture and is meant to be an encyclopedia of the Vlachs.

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