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# THE PREFERRED LANGUAGE OF MEDIA CONTENT AMONG THE SERBIAN DIASPORA IN VIENNA

Sanja D. MIKETIĆ SUBOTIĆ<sup>1</sup>

University of Priština in Kosovska Mitrovica  
Faculty of Philosophy  
Department of Serbian Language and Literature  
Kosovska Mitrovica (Serbia)

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<sup>1</sup> sanja.miketic@pr.ac.rs;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8994-745X>

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*Abstract.* This paper aims to determine the preferred language (Serbian, German, or another) of various types of content—music, TV programs, films, books, newspapers and magazines, radio, and news—among members of the Serbian diaspora in Vienna. The research included a heterogeneous group of randomly selected adults who identified themselves as Serbs or of Serbian origin and had resided in Vienna for at least one year (N = 400). Participants reported their typical language choices using a closed-ended questionnaire, and the data were analyzed using SPSS software. The variables used in this paper were: age, gender, language of questionnaire completion, mother tongue, country of birth, migrant generation, length of residence in Austria, educational level, language spoken by parents, partner, and friends, ethnic and cultural self-identification, return migration intentions, and religious involvement (church attendance).

This study aims to investigate how domain-specific language preferences among members of the Serbian community in Vienna are shaped by a complex interplay of biographical proximity to the heritage language, social embeddedness in Serbian-speaking networks, and ideological alignment with ethnocultural identity. Rather than treating language choice as a static reflection of individual attributes, the study seeks to uncover the sociolinguistic conditions under which language practices emerge, persist, or shift in transnational contexts. We concluded that media language choice within this community is shaped less by traditional sociodemographic variables and more by affective, symbolic, and contextual factors tied to identity, intimacy, and migration stage. The findings revealed a clear preference for Serbian in emotionally salient media such as music and books, while a balanced use of both Serbian and German was observed in other media domains.

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<sup>2</sup> This article is based on empirical data collected during the author's six-month research project titled *Attitudes of the Serbian Community in Vienna Towards Serbian and German Language and Culture* (see [project-slav.com](http://project-slav.com)), carried out in 2024 at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage (ACDH-CH) within the framework of the JESH fellowship awarded by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW).

### *Migration, Media, and Language Maintenance*

Migration often leads to complex linguistic outcomes, where a minority or heritage language must coexist with a dominant host-country language. In migration contexts, three central sociolinguistic phenomena are particularly significant: language maintenance, language shift, and language attrition. Language maintenance refers to “a situation in which a speaker, a group of speakers, or a speech community continue to use their language in some or all spheres of life despite competition with the dominant or majority language to become the main/sole language in these spheres” (Pauwels, 2004, p. 719), whereas language shift is the process by which the heritage language is gradually replaced by the dominant language at the individual level (Fishman, 1964; Pauwels, 2004). Language shift is used to describe the process where the “speech community (gradually) gives up or loses the use of its language and/or of many functions of the language and shifts to the use of another language for most, if not all its communicative and other cultural, symbolic needs” (Pauwels, 2004, p. 720). Pauwels further claims that this is “usually signaled by a period of transitional (unstable) bilingualism in which the competing languages are used side by side in a community, with one language progressively intruding into all spheres of the other language.” In turn, language attrition describes the loss of proficiency in a language due to declining use, often affecting migrants’ first language over time (Schmid, 2011).

This paper explores the interplay between these sociolinguistic constructs, observed variables, and the habits of consuming various types of media (TV programs, news, movies, books, radio, and newspapers/magazines) in Serbian or German among the Serbian community in Vienna, and seeks to find out to what

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extent they contribute to fostering heritage language maintenance and delaying language shift and attrition in migrant communities.

One of the parameters for estimating the ethnolinguistic vitality of a heritage or any other language is its vibrant presence in mass media; the European Language Vitality Barometer (Laakso et al., 2016) thus lists the existence of media in one language, its media use, and its consumption as sociolinguistic indicators or variables of the ethnolinguistic vitality of a language. Vertovec (2009) highlights the role of media in supporting heritage languages, noting that they enable migrants to maintain regular contact with their home countries, fostering emotional, cultural, and linguistic continuity across borders, sustaining cultural identity, strengthening collective memory and group loyalty, and counteracting assimilationist pressures. Previous studies have shown that diaspora communities consciously utilize institutions such as schools, religious centers, and ethnic media to preserve and maintain their linguistic and cultural identity, serving as important channels for migrants to access news and culture in their mother tongue, thereby reinforcing cultural traditions and facilitating the intergenerational transmission of language (see Fishman, 1991; Safran, 1991; Rios & Gaines, 1998; Christoph, 2012).

Media allow migrants to maintain ties with their homeland and sustain a sense of community across distances. At the same time, migrants must navigate the media of their host country, striking a balance between integration and cultural retention. For many migrants, media are not simply sources of information, but emotional and symbolic bridges to the homeland, allowing them to maintain linguistic competence and cultural knowledge from afar, and to resist cultural assimilation while (selectively) engaging with the dominant culture (King & Wood, 2001; Aksoy & Robins, 2002; Cormack, 2007; Hamel, 2009; Hopkins, 2009). Some studies on the topic of media among migrants warn about their influence on a possible lack of integration into the new society (Christiansen, 2004).<sup>3</sup>

Aksoy and Robins (2002, p. 7) suggest that transnational television has brought about a dynamic shift in how migrants manage separation and distance. Television and films are powerful tools for language exposure in diasporic settings. Migrants who watch television in their heritage language receive daily auditory and visual reinforcement of that language's vocabulary, pronunciation, and idioms. Regular exposure to homeland TV programs<sup>4</sup> can expand one's linguistic

<sup>3</sup> For some interviewees, especially the less educated, German is limited to obligatory work contexts (often manual jobs requiring little language use), while the private sphere, including media, remains almost entirely in the heritage language.

<sup>4</sup> Migrants are often part of economically vulnerable and socially marginalized groups, for whom access to ICT and diversified media content cannot be taken for granted. As Christoph (2012, p. 98) observes, some individuals lack internet access, smartphones, and computers, as well as the knowledge to use it, and do not regularly read newspapers. For them, television remains the only available medium, and access to television in their heritage language is often a luxury they cannot afford (see also Hamel, 2009). This phenomenon is present among a very small number of observed migrants: for many, video calls and television

repertoire in the heritage language beyond the conversational register used at home (e.g., Ogan, 2001; Aksoy & Robins, 2002; Christiansen, 2004; Hamel, 2009; Green, 2014; Polinsky, 2015). Movies in the heritage language similarly provide cultural and linguistic input. They serve as a repository<sup>5</sup> of cultural references, humor, and storytelling in the heritage language. King and Wood (2001) note that via media, migrants keep their language skills sharp and cultivate their identity, while those who consume films and TV exclusively in the majority language may experience a faster erosion of their heritage language, as one domain of use (media) undergoes a shift.

News media, whether broadcast news or print journalism, play a significant part in language maintenance for migrants. Following news from one's country of origin in the original language helps migrants maintain a formal register and expand their vocabulary on current affairs. Newspapers and magazines<sup>6</sup> in the heritage language (often referred to as *ethnic press*<sup>7</sup>) are also an important means of language maintenance, as they foster identity construction, address information

in the heritage language represents the cheapest and often the only affordable form of entertainment—a modest luxury that is generally accessible nowadays.

<sup>5</sup> One interviewee (male, 35, in Vienna less than 5 years) noted with a sense of nostalgia that it is disheartening that only first-generation migrants still understand the humor, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references embedded in popular Serbian films and television series. There is a noticeable lack of shared cultural knowledge around emblematic characters such as Riska from *Srećni ljudi*, Tika Špic from *Porodično blago*, Pikac, Pacov, and Raka from *Vratiće se rode*, or Nikola from *Mi nismo anđeli* (iconic TV shows which serve as common reference points among Serbia-based audiences). The diminished recognition of such figures among younger or Austrian-born members of the diaspora reflects not only a linguistic gap but also a rupture in the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. It is also noted that such expressions may serve as immediate triggers of social closeness among individuals who share the same cultural reference frame. This generational gap is—in the opinion of the researcher—also visible in the home country, though not to the same extent, which makes it an idea worth further exploration. As comparable dynamics are present in contemporary Serbia, albeit to a lesser extent, the matter merits systematic further study.

<sup>6</sup> According to one interviewee, the consumption of newspapers and magazines has largely shifted to digital platforms, driven by ease of access, the high cost of print, and the limited availability of physical copies. In contrast, in the pre-Internet era, they were able to buy magazines such as *Duga*, *Bazar*, *Dama*, *Ilustrovana politika*, or *Profil*, as well as weekly magazines and love novels, initially at two of the city's train stations, and later at other locations in the city. While there are media outlets such as *Kosmo* magazine, which targets ex-Yugoslav audiences and includes content both in the local heritage languages and in German translation, its printed version is mainly distributed in spaces frequented by Serbian-speaking clients (e.g., hair salons, medical offices), whereas its online platform is available only in German.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper, the term *press* is used generically. A stricter differentiation between ethnic and local press (in its narrow meaning of press created and/or published by members of a specific ethnic community in the diaspora, intended for an audience of the same ethnic background) is flagged here as a priority for future research. Future research should also systematically examine newer, algorithmically driven platforms (e.g., TikTok, X/Twitter), given their growing role in diasporic media practices, which we believe are worth examining.

gaps left by mainstream media due to their community-based nature, and strengthen transnational ties and diasporic cohesion (Olzak & West, 1991; Vertovec, 2009).

Whereas media like TV and news provide continuous exposure to spoken language, books and literature in the heritage language are essential for developing and maintaining literacy and deep cultural knowledge, similar to ethnic press. By engaging with written texts that reflect familiar values and narratives, readers sustain emotional bonds with their linguistic identity, thereby counteracting processes of language shift and attrition (Vertovec, 2009; Schmid, 2011).

Ethnic radio can play an important role in supporting the maintenance of heritage languages within migrant communities, as it can be used as background reinforcement of language. By providing regular auditory exposure to idiomatic expressions, contemporary vocabulary, and standardized pronunciation, it enhances both passive and active linguistic competence beyond the domestic sphere. Its accessibility, cultural relevance, and role in identity affirmation make it a low-effort yet powerful tool for countering language shift and attrition that fosters intergenerational continuity and supports transnational ties (Fishman, 1991; Vertovec, 2009; Schmid, 2011; Extra & Yağmur, 2012).

Music in heritage languages holds a significant role in the emotional and linguistic experiences of migrants, acting as a resilient form of cultural expression. It is closely tied to memory and identity, helping individuals sustain a connection to their homeland even as other forms of language use fade. The lyrical content of songs reinforces vocabulary and idiomatic expressions within emotionally resonant contexts, which enhances language retention and vitality (Baily & Collyer, 2006; Lidskog, 2016). Ultimately, music perpetuates emotional bonds and acts as a vessel for cultural memory, contributing to both linguistic identity and resilience (Silverman, 2012; Stokes, 1994, 2021).

### *Methodological Framework*

The proposed methodological framework, relevant for this type of research, is rooted in contemporary approaches to exploring language attitudes and ideologies (see Kircher & Zipp, 2022). The core of this study primarily relies on quantitative methods, utilizing a questionnaire consisting of closed-type answers (5-point semantic differential scale, yes/no questions, multiple-choice questions, etc.), which was administered both online and in paper form during the fieldwork study in Vienna. Statistical data processing was carried out using the IBM SPSS v27.0 software package. The analysis included the determination of measures of central tendency and variability. The normality of data distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test at a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . To determine statistical significance, the Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test, chi-square test, and Fisher's exact test were applied, also at a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .

The questionnaire was specifically tailored to the requirements of this study while also taking into account previous research on the Serbian language in the diaspora (e.g., Павловић, 1990, 2012; Лукић-Крстановић, 1992; Савић, 2019), as well as the research manual *The Language Attrition Test Battery* (Schmid, 2005). In designing the questionnaire and in the subsequent analysis, we also considered the limited number of linguistic studies on this community in Vienna (see, e.g., Ilić-Marković, 2010; Дојчиновић & Филиповић, 2025), alongside more numerous studies from the fields of ethnology and anthropology (e.g., Хаидер-Лабудовић, 2007; Rašić, 2022; Rašić & Antonijević, 2023).

The study included a range of variables relevant to the analysis of language practices and cultural affiliation among Serbian migrants in Austria. Sociodemographic variables encompassed participants' age, gender, country of birth (Serbia or Austria), length of residence in Austria (measured in years), migrant generation status, and nationality. Additionally, responses were analyzed in relation to variables such as the mother tongue of both parents and that of the participant's partner, where applicable. Linguistic variables included the language in which the participant completed the survey (Serbian or German), their self-declared mother tongue, and the language predominantly spoken among their close friends (also Serbian or German). Finally, cultural and identity-related variables included participants' intended future mobility (i.e., whether they expressed a desire to return to Serbia), cultural identification (with Serbian or Austrian culture, or both), and religious affiliation, operationalized as attendance at Serbian Orthodox services, as almost all informants were Christian Orthodox.

A probabilistic random sampling method was employed, and 400 participants took part in the study, all of whom had been living in Vienna for more than one year at the time the study was conducted and self-identified as Serbs or as of Serbian descent.

For the purpose of this paper, one question was analyzed: What language do you usually use when watching, listening to, or reading: music/TV/movies/books/newspapers and magazines/radio/news? As it was a closed-type questionnaire, the available answers were: another language/only Serbian/mostly Serbian/Serbian and German equally/mostly German/only German.

As part of the broader project, a series of 30 interviews was also conducted. In this paper, we draw on qualitative excerpts to provide contextual support and cross-checking of quantitative data, positioning this study as primarily quantitative. A mixed-method approach will be elaborated in greater detail in a forthcoming study. The analysis presented in this paper is based on one item from a larger, piloted questionnaire.

We aim to investigate how domain-specific language preferences among members of the Serbian community in Vienna are shaped by a complex interplay of biographical proximity to the heritage language, social embeddedness in Serbian-speaking networks, and ideological consonance with ethnocultural

identity. Rather than treating language choice as a static reflection of individual attributes, the study seeks to uncover the sociolinguistic conditions under which bilingual practices emerge, persist, or shift in transnational contexts, and to identify the relevant variables, analyzing how they operate and how strongly they affect bilingual practices. The questionnaire item was designed according to a five-point Likert-scale model, complemented by an additional “another language” option.

*Overall Results*

Overall results indicate that Serbian remains dominant across most media domains and continues to be actively used, especially in what is considered as more emotionally and culturally salient content—primarily music and literature. In contrast, functional bilingualism is most visible in the domains of news and print media. Categories indicating bilingual use dominate across most observed media types, suggesting a flexible language practice that may reflect a slow, gradual, and sometimes non-linear integration process, starting with the parallel use of the majority language. Preferences for German remain lower overall compared to preferences for Serbian. However, while “only German” responses are particularly low, the “mostly German” category shows somewhat higher figures. Although still lower than Serbian, this may indicate an early tendency toward language shift in future generations.

Table 1. Language preferences by media type among Serbian speakers in Vienna (N = 400)

	Music	TV	Movies	Books	Newspapers and magazines	Radio	News
Another language	15.0%	11.5%	22%	5.7%	4.7%	7.7%	3.7%
Only Serbian	24.2%	13.6%	9.6%	20.6%	9.9%	12.7%	13.2%
Mostly Serbian	36.1%	27.1%	18.3%	33.1%	21.7%	24.1%	21.4%
Serbian and German equally	22.9%	33.5%	33.9%	25.5%	38.7%	31.8%	41.2%
Mostly German	1.0%	10.0%	13.2%	9.9%	17.5%	17.8%	15.3%
Only German	0.8%	4.3%	3.1%	5.2%	7.3%	5.8%	5.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The highest preference for “only Serbian” was observed in music (24.2%), followed by books (20.6%), TV (13.6%), and news (13.2%), while the lowest rates of “only Serbian” responses were observed in the domains of newspapers and magazines (9.9%) and films (9.6%). This result suggests that emotionally resonant and culturally intimate forms of media, such as music and literature, provide stronger reinforcement for heritage language use. In contrast, media

domains associated with public discourse and broader societal integration, such as newspapers, magazines, and films, are more susceptible to language shift due to greater exposure to dominant language ideologies and the perceived need for linguistic assimilation.

The combined use of Serbian and German is most frequent in consuming news (41.2%), followed by print media (38.7%), indicating a high level of functional bilingualism in cognitively demanding, informative domains such as reading and staying informed. The lowest rate of bilingual use was observed in the music domain. These patterns reflect a distinction between practical, functional bilingualism (used for news and newspapers) and affective monolingualism (more common in music), where one language is used for institutional or practical access to information, and the other for emotional or cultural proximity. The lower presence of German in affective domains and the strong bilingualism in others may indicate that heritage language maintenance can persist even in highly integrated bilingual settings, particularly when domains are closely tied to identity.

Monolingual preferences for German remain relatively low overall, particularly in music (only 0.8%), suggesting strong linguistic resilience in emotionally charged media content. The highest share of German-only preference was found in newspapers and magazines, reaching 7.3%. The avoidance of monolingual German use across media domains may reflect the symbolic and identity-related function of the heritage language, which is preserved even by highly integrated or bilingual individuals. The rate of exclusive German use remains modest, indicating a slow and domain-specific shift rather than a wholesale replacement of the heritage language. Despite its institutional dominance, German appears to have limited appeal in intimate and culturally embedded domains, suggesting that prestige alone does not guarantee domain-wide language shift.

The proportion of respondents choosing “another language” is highest for movies (22%) and music (15%), likely reflecting exposure to globalized media practices or the influence of dominant global cultures. Such a high share may indicate a generational shift toward cosmopolitan media preferences, in which English and other global languages often dominate. Such preferences can dilute exposure to the heritage language in informal and entertainment contexts, underscoring the need for intentional efforts to maintain linguistic continuity through targeted cultural and media policies. Additionally, they may also reduce exposure to the German language. However, this situation does not necessarily imply abandonment of the heritage language, but may instead reflect transcultural identities and multilingual competence, especially among younger generations, who develop hybrid patterns of media consumption.<sup>8</sup> This distribution suggests

<sup>8</sup> This tendency has been observed in other national contexts as well, where both migrant and majority youth increasingly consume globalized media content—primarily in English—at the expense of local content. For instance, in Sweden, it was noted that “whether majority or

that both Serbian and German may be losing their exclusivity in certain cultural domains, as language preferences in certain domains are increasingly shaped by global trends and digital habits.

### *Statistical Analysis*

To examine the relationship between sociolinguistic variables, this study employed Fisher's Exact Test to determine whether the observed relationships were due to chance or reflected genuine underlying patterns. In plain terms, a statistically significant result ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that there is less than a 5% probability that the observed association occurred by chance; similarly,  $p < 0.01$  suggests less than a 1% probability of random occurrence.

The results of the statistical analysis are presented in the table below. A hyphen (-) in the table indicates that no statistically significant association was found between the respective media domain and the given variable.

Table 2. Statistically significant correlations between sociodemographic variables and language choice across media types among Serbian speakers in Vienna (N = 400)

	Music	TV	Movies	Books	Newspapers and magazines	Radio	News
Age	-	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	-	-	-
Gender	$p < 0.01$	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lang. of quest. completion	-	$p < 0.05$	-	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$	-	$p < 0.01$
Mother tongue	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$
Country of birth	-	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	-	$p < 0.001$
Migrant generation	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	-	$p < 0.01$
Length of residence in Austria	-	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$
Education	$p < 0.01$	-	-	-	-	$p < 0.05$	-
Language of parents	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$	-	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$
Language of partner	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	-	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$
Self-identification	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Return migration intentions	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$
Cultural identification	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Language of friends	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Church attendance	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	-	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	-

Statistical significance observed for a variable does not imply that all sub-groups were equally affected. For example, in the case of age, significance was found exclusively among older participants.

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minority, they watch American sit-coms and reality shows more than Swedish 'educational' programs," which may hinder the internalization of national values among both native and migrant youth (Roald, 2013).

### Age<sup>9</sup>

A statistically significant association was found between respondents' age and their preferred language for consuming TV programs, films, and books. Significance consistently emerged within the older age group, who reported watching TV, viewing films, and reading books "mostly in Serbian," indicating that they remain more anchored in monolingual practices. The 1980s generation also exhibits a strikingly clear pattern of heritage language maintenance, indicating a high level of attachment to Serbian in their media consumption.

### Gender

A statistically significant association was observed only among female respondents, who were significantly more likely than males to report listening to music equally in Serbian and German. This result suggests a higher degree of linguistic flexibility and a hybrid cultural orientation among women. In contrast, male respondents may adhere more to monolingual practices, either as a marker of heritage loyalty or due to limited exposure. Female respondents appear more open to cross-cultural influences and adopt bilingual media habits that reinforce both linguistic systems in parallel.

### Language of Questionnaire Completion

As participants had the option to complete the questionnaire in either German or Serbian, we aimed to examine whether their spontaneous choice of Serbian<sup>10</sup> over German or vice versa could be related to their media language preferences.

<sup>9</sup> Due to space limitations, the full set of results for all observed variables and a more detailed sociolinguistic interpretation will be presented in a forthcoming in-depth study.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to acknowledge the potential influence of the observer's paradox in this case: the researcher was a native speaker of Serbian, the topic centered on the Serbian language, and even though the questionnaire was equally available in both Serbian and German, 84.2% of respondents chose to complete the survey in Serbian. This indicates that the linguistic choice may have been shaped by contextual cues, such as the researcher's identity and the thematic focus, rather than reflecting everyday language behavior. Having the option to complete the questionnaire in Serbian may have encouraged participants to use their heritage language, especially if such opportunities are rare in their everyday environment.

The availability of the Serbian version in Latin script only also prompted mixed reactions. While a few participants commented that the questionnaire should have been written in Cyrillic script, several, especially from younger generations, welcomed the Latin script version, noting that it made reading and completing the survey easier (see also Rašić, 2020, pp. 185–186). This observation completely aligns with previous findings, where identical comments were given by members of the Serbian diaspora in Australia, even to an extreme extent, with some participants refusing to take part because there was no Cyrillic version of the questionnaire (Савић, 2019). In our study, however, there were no such extreme reactions.

Respondents who completed the survey in Serbian were statistically significantly more likely to watch TV exclusively in Serbian and to read books, newspapers, and magazines only or mostly in Serbian. Additionally, this group was more likely than those who completed the questionnaire in German to listen to news in both languages.

### Mother Tongue

One questionnaire item explicitly asked respondents to identify their “mother tongue.” This self-reported variable was later included in the statistical analysis and proved to be significant across all observed media domains, consistently correlating with a higher likelihood of using Serbian among those who identified it as their mother tongue. Statistical analysis confirmed that these respondents were more likely to listen to music, watch TV, and read books mostly in Serbian, compared to those who considered German or both languages to be their mother tongue(s). They also showed a greater tendency to consume radio, news, movies, and print media equally in both languages.

### Country of Birth: Serbia vs. Austria

Respondents born in Serbia were significantly more likely to report reading books in Serbian, compared to those born in Austria. They also showed a more balanced bilingual preference for TV programs, news, movies, and newspapers and magazines. This suggests that the primary linguistic environment shapes long-term language habits, and the language in which they began their literacy development would be the language of choice for books later in life. Compared to the other group, their more balanced bilingual preferences in media consumption indicate additive bilingualism in many domains, where proficiency and functional use of both languages are maintained without one replacing the other.

### Migrant Generation

First-generation migrants reported significantly more frequent listening to music and reading books in Serbian compared to members of other generations. They also demonstrated a more balanced preference for both Serbian and German when it comes to TV programs, news, and movies. No statistically significant patterns were observed among other migrant generations, which may be interpreted within the framework of intergenerational language transmission (Fishman, 1991).

### Length of Residence in Austria

Statistically significant patterns were found among respondents who had resided in Vienna for less than five years across all domains except music. Members of

this group tended to watch the news and listen to the radio, as well as read books, newspapers, and magazines only in Serbian. They also reported watching TV and movies mostly in Serbian, compared to those who had lived in Vienna for more than five years. This aligns with the principle of communicative efficiency (Levshina, 2022), where speakers choose the language in which they feel most competent and confident while minimizing time and effort. In the initial phase of migration, there is often strong language loyalty and an emotional need to preserve cultural continuity. As a result, the linguistic routines of new migrants residing in Vienna still reflect a monolingual, pre-migration experience.

### Education

A statistically significant effect of education was observed among respondents with a university degree, who demonstrated a higher tendency to consume radio and music content in both Serbian and German, compared to participants with other education levels. This may suggest greater linguistic flexibility and a higher degree of functional bilingualism.

### Language Spoken by Parents

The majority of participants come from families in which both parents identified Serbian as their first language. Only a small number reported mixed parental language backgrounds, with one parent speaking Serbian and the other German as their first language. This may have contributed to the fact that statistically significant results were observed only within the cohort whose both parents are native Serbian speakers. Within this group, participants reported listening to music and reading books primarily in Serbian, while consuming TV programs, news, radio, and newspapers in equal amounts in both languages. This finding supports the claim that the language spoken within the family plays a central role in intergenerational language transmission (Fishman, 1991; Pauwels, 2016). When both parents share the same first language, as in this case, children are exposed to consistent and unambiguous linguistic input, which significantly increases the likelihood of maintaining the heritage language across generations (De Houwer, 2007). A monolingual home environment provides a clear model of language use and identity, which may explain why this group displayed statistically significant patterns of Serbian language use.

### Language Spoken by Partner

When examining the three cohorts—those whose partners are native speakers of Serbian, German, or another language—statistically significant results were found only among respondents whose partners identified Serbian as their mother

tongue. This may partly be due to the fact that this group was also the most numerous. The significance suggests that this cohort tends to watch TV, read books, and listen to music predominantly in Serbian, while consuming news, radio, and movies equally in both languages. The partner's language plays a key role in shaping everyday language use, as this relationship involves the most frequent and intimate communication. When both partners share the same heritage language, that language is more consistently used in private and family domains, supporting its maintenance (King & Fogle, 2006; De Houwer, 2007; Spolsky, 2012).

### Self-Identification

As claimed by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), self-identification in migratory settings is not merely a reflection of language use, but an active process shaped by sociolinguistic conditions and ideological positioning. In such settings, multilingual individuals often engage in complex identity negotiations, and their language use reflects both personal alignment and social positioning. For the questionnaire item "How do you perceive yourself?", respondents were offered three options: (1) as Serbian, (2) as Austrian, and (3) as both. Statistically significant results were observed only within the cohort that identified as Serbian, which was also the most numerous. The other two groups were considerably smaller, although slightly more respondents identified as both than as exclusively Austrian. Respondents who identified primarily as Serbian were significantly more likely to listen to music and read books predominantly in Serbian, while consuming all other observed media domains equally in both languages.

### Return Migration Intentions

Return intentions emerged as a significant factor, influencing language use across all media domains. The group of respondents who expressed a desire to return to Serbia was the only one to show consistent and statistically significant patterns, while the cohorts of those who might return and those who will never return gave no statistically significant answers. Within this group, Serbian was predominantly used for music, television, books, and radio, while news, newspapers, and films were consumed equally in both languages.

### Cultural Identification

Statistical significance was observed only among respondents who identified with Serbian culture. No significant correlations were found among those who identified with Austrian or both cultures, which may suggest less ideologically driven and more flexible language use. For the Serbian-affiliated group, language use was statistically significant across all media domains: they listened to music

and read books and newspapers mostly in Serbian, while consuming all other media—TV, radio, films, and news—equally in both languages. Cultural affiliation has a clear influence on language loyalty, as it serves as an ideological framework through which language practices are shaped, particularly in diasporic contexts, where language becomes a marker of ethnic and cultural identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Edwards, 2009).

### Language Spoken by Friends

Respondents whose friends predominantly spoke Serbian were significantly more likely to use Serbian in emotionally charged media domains such as music, books, films, and newspapers compared to the other cohort, whose friends spoke mainly German. In contrast, in domains associated with information and public discourse, they exhibited a more balanced use of both Serbian and German. This suggests domain-specific bilingualism, shaped by the linguistic profile of one's social networks.

### Church Attendance

Statistical significance was found only among the group attending church once a week: they consumed TV, radio, music, and newspapers mostly in Serbian, while they watched films equally in both languages. Regular church attendance is often linked to the preservation of traditional identities, and religious practice may serve as a symbolic resource contributing to the reinforcement of collective identity and language (see, e.g., Omoniyi, 2012; Joo et al., 2024). According to the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles et al., 1977), institutional support such as that provided through education, religion, and media plays a crucial role in maintaining a group's ethnolinguistic vitality. In this context, religious practice can be seen as an informal institutional support that contributes to the preservation of the Serbian language and collective identity (although the author initially expected a much stronger correlation between church attendance and preference for Serbian-language media).

### Conclusion

This study analyzed media language preferences among 400 members of the Serbian diaspora in Vienna, revealing a complex and dynamic pattern of domain-specific language choice across seven media categories: music, television, film, books, print media, radio, and news.<sup>11</sup> Participants actively navigated a balance

<sup>11</sup> Although this community is highly heterogeneous, and we sought to ensure that our sample reflects this diversity, we do not claim that the findings are fully generalizable. Rather,

between their heritage language, Serbian, and the dominant language, German, developing a distinctive, hybrid, complex, and dynamic pattern, often seen in the context of migration. The results indicate that their choice of media language is domain-dependent and both fragmented and additive in nature. Our findings reconfirm that language choice in multilingual settings is shaped by more than communicative needs: it reflects and reproduces broader ideological structures and power relations, as well as social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, as emphasized by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004).

A stronger preference for Serbian was present among all cohorts in emotionally charged media domains (such as music and books), which can be interpreted as a form of symbolic resistance to assimilation and a means of reaffirming cultural identity. At the same time, equal usage of both Serbian and German prevails in public information contexts, such as news, indicating a pragmatic shift towards integration. This pattern reflects the distinction between the communicative and symbolic functions of language. As Edwards (2009) notes, even when a language undergoes functional decline in everyday communication, it can retain its symbolic resonance for extended periods. In our case, Serbian continues to carry significant symbolic weight in emotionally salient domains such as music and literature, serving as a marker of identity and cultural continuity in areas that are least subject to external judgment. Among all the examined domains, music appears to offer the greatest symbolic resistance to language shift and may constitute the final domain in which Serbian continues to thrive.

In this paper, we aimed to identify a pattern in the active negotiation of language choices and identities within a multilingual context among the observed community. Sociodemographic factors significantly influence these choices. Contrary to our initial expectations, traditional sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, and education did not yield as many consistent or statistically significant patterns as expected. Instead, the data revealed a more fragmented and complex landscape of language preferences, suggesting that other factors, such as symbolic attachment, migration trajectory, or ethnic and cultural self-identification, may play a more decisive role in shaping media language choice.

Statistical significance emerged only among older respondents, reflecting both language loyalty and practical usage of both languages. Female participants showed somewhat greater linguistic flexibility and hybrid identity orientation, while males tended to maintain monolingual patterns, possibly reflecting more conservative language attitudes. Participants who completed the survey in Serbian were more likely to consume media in Serbian, suggesting that their spontaneous

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as the first exploratory study on this topic, they offer empirically grounded insights into field realities that future studies can test and extend. A key contextual constraint, although also an important sociolinguistic insight, was that voluntary participation in the study primarily came from highly educated women, who appeared to be more aware of the importance of the heritage language in the diaspora.

choice of the heritage language in the questionnaire correlates with their broader media language preferences. Identifying Serbian as a mother tongue correlated strongly with use of Serbian across all media domains, particularly those with emotional or cultural content.

Respondents born in Serbia showed a stronger attachment to Serbian in books, while also exhibiting additive bilingualism in other domains, suggesting that early literacy experiences in the heritage language shape reading habits into adulthood. Recent migrants (those who have been in the country for less than five years) consumed media almost exclusively in Serbian, especially in informational domains, indicating a continued reliance on their L1 due to limited proficiency and confidence in their L2. Over time, exposure to German increases, prompting more balanced bilingual practices. Respondents with university degrees displayed somewhat more balanced bilingualism, suggesting that higher education may facilitate openness to both linguistic repertoires and a more pragmatic approach to media content.

Participants from monolingual Serbian-speaking households were significantly more likely to prefer Serbian in media use, especially in intimate domains. This underscores the importance of consistent parental input in fostering language maintenance across generations (Giles et al., 1977; Fishman, 1991). When both partners speak Serbian, the language is more likely to be maintained in private domains, serving both symbolic and communicative functions. Those who self-identified as Serbian and culturally aligned with Serbian heritage consumed Serbian media across all domains, while other identification groups did not yield significant results. Identity thus emerges as a major ideological and affective anchor for language use. Respondents planning to return to Serbia showed the highest levels of Serbian media use across domains. Serbian-speaking friends and weekly church attendance were associated with greater Serbian use in traditional domains. These forms of informal institutional support (cf. ethnolinguistic vitality theory, Giles et al., 1977) appear to bolster language maintenance, even when functional bilingualism persists.

Statistically significant differences in language practices most frequently occur among respondents who are strongly connected to the Serbian language and identity in various ways. These are individuals who, biographically and in their everyday lives, are closer to their heritage language, whether they were born in Serbia, identify Serbian as their mother tongue, have recently migrated, or belong to the first generation of migrants. The role of the immediate linguistic environment also proves crucial: respondents surrounded by Serbian in the private sphere, through communication with parents, partners, or friends, are more likely to exhibit language loyalty to Serbian.

In addition to language practice, the ideological dimensions of identity play a key role. Those who identify themselves as Serbian, express a desire to return to Serbia, regularly attend church, or culturally align themselves with Serbian

heritage display statistically significant patterns of Serbian language use. Finally, these patterns appear more frequently in the early stages of migration, when contact with the host language is still limited and the need to preserve the heritage language remains strong.

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Сања Д. МИКЕТИЋ СУБОТИЋ

Универзитет у Приштини са привременим  
седиштем у Косовској Митровици  
Филозофски факултет  
Катедра за српски језик и књижевност  
Косовска Митровица (Србија)

## Преферирани језик медијског садржаја међу припадницима српске дијаспоре у Бечу

### Резиме

Циљ овог рада је утврђивање преферираног језика (српски, немачки или неки други језик) различитих врста садржаја – музике, ТВ програма, филмова, књига, новина и часописа, радија и вести – међу припадницима српске дијаспоре у Бечу. Истраживање је обухватило хетерогену групу насумично одабраних одраслих особа које су се идентификовале као Срби или српског порекла и које су живеље у Бечу најмање годину дана ( $N = 400$ ). Учесници су пријавили своје типичне језичке изборе користећи упитник затвореног типа, а подаци су анализирани путем SPSS софтвера. Варијабле коришћене у овом раду биле су: старост, пол, језик попуњавања упитника, матерњи језик, земља рођења, мигрантска генерација, дужина боравка у Аустрији, ниво образовања, језик којим говоре родитељи, партнер и пријатељи, етничка и културна самоидентификација, намере за повратак у Србију и верска укљученост (посећивање цркве). Желели смо да увидимо на који начин су језичке преференције међу члановима српске заједнице у Бечу обликоване сложенем интеракцијом биографске блискости језику порекла, укореношћу у друштвеним мрежама где се доминантно говори на српском, и идеолошког преговарања са етнокултурним идентитетом, када су у питању различите врсте медија. Закључили смо да је избор медијског језика унутар ове заједнице мање обликован традиционалним социодемографским варијаблама (пол, узраст, образовање), већ пре свега афективним, симболичким, прагматичним и контекстуалним факторима, који су уско повезани са идентитетском припадношћу, степеном афективне везе са језиком порекла и фазом миграционог процеса. Резултати указују на доминантно коришћење српског језика у медијима са снажнијом афективном компонентом као што су, пре свега, музика, а потом, у мањој мери, и књиге, док је уравнотежен ниво употребе и српског и немачког језика примећен у другим анализираним медијским доменима.

**Кључне речи:** српски језик; немачки језик; Срби; дијаспора; Беч; медији; избор језика.



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