



**VLACH LECTURES: HERITAGE AND RESILIENCE**

# **WHAT IS MULTILINGUALISM?**

## **TOWARDS A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON RESEARCH AND SOCIETY**

**YARON MATRAS**

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### **ORGANIZATION AND CONTACT**

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Commission Vanishing Languages and Cultural Heritage



# PROGRAMME

## *What is multilingualism? Towards a critical reflection on research and society*

New and complex connections between people and places, flexible mobility and communication modes have created what social scientists have termed diverse 'ethnoscapes', transnationalism and local 'super-diversity'. It is a new approach to identity and belonging that is tailored to a globalised world. When it comes to language, this requires us to rethink some of the notions that have been taken for granted both in academic discussions and in our understanding of social realities identity and belonging: Concepts like 'mother tongue' or 'native language' suggest unambiguous ownership of language. But the reality is one in which various actors shape and contribute to language practices beyond fixed attributes like parentage or place of birth. Language itself is viewed traditionally in linguistic research and in society as an entity with clear boundaries that is linked to a fixed community of individuals; critical theory are now shifting to focus on dynamic and fluid repertoires of features that users embrace through networks of practice that are ever evolving. In his talk, Yaron Matras will revisit multilingualism through the lens of practice, addressing questions like: Can we count languages? Can we rely on native speaker judgement in research and judicial procedures? Can structures really be 'borrowed' from one language to another? What is the place of ideologies on the continuum of language practice? He draws on a variety of observations, including his work of many years on the Romani language and its dialects.



**Yaron Matras** is one of the leading experts on language contact and on the Romani language. He was Professor of Linguistics at the University of Manchester until 2020, where he founded and led the Multilingual Manchester project, and was British Academy Wolfson Professorial Fellow. He now holds affiliations at the Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics in Birmingham, the Department for Hebrew Language at the University of Haifa, the Department of Linguistics at the Humboldt University in Berlin and the Hanse Wissenschaftskolleg Institute for Advanced Study. His books include *Romani: A linguistic introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), *Language contact* (Cambridge University Press, 2009/2020), *Romani in Britain: The afterlife of a language* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), *A grammar of Domari* (De Gruyter Mouton, 2012), and *Speech and the city: multilingualism, decoloniality and the civic university* (to appear later this year with Cambridge University Press).

### 16.00 WELCOME

**Thede Kahl** | Chair of the Commission Vanishing Language and Cultural Heritage, corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

### 16.15–17.15 LECTURE

**Yaron Matras** | Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics, Birmingham  
Department for Hebrew Language, University of Haifa  
*What is multilingualism? Towards a critical reflection on research and society*

### 17.15–17.45 DISCUSSION

### 17.45 SMALL RECEPTION