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Scandoromani: Remnants of a mixed language by Gerd Carling, Lenny Lindell, Gilbert Ambrazaitis (review)

Yaron Matras

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Scandoromani: Remnants of a mixed language. Gerd Carling, Lenny Lindell, Gilbert Ambrazaitis. 2014. Leiden: Brill. xvi + 294 pp. ISBN 978 90 26644 5.

Reviewed by YARON MATRAS

Para-Romani varieties are spoken by traditionally itinerant populations in Britain, Scandinavia, Portugal, and the Basque Country, as well as by Gitanos in Spain (only some of whom are itinerant). There are also elements of what might be regarded as either established or in some cases incipient Para-Romani varieties among Romani/Gypsy populations in other countries including Hungary, Austria, Greece, Serbia, and Turkey. The term ‘Para-Romani’ has been used since the appearance of a collection edited by Bakker and Cortiade (1991) to denote the use of a Romani-derived lexicon within the structural (grammatical and phonological, and indeed discourse) framework of the majority language. While earlier studies tended to adopt a formal approach exemplifying and interpreting the use of such vocabulary primarily through the prism of out-of-context, sentence-level investigation, in Matras et al. (2007) and Matras (2010) we presented a view of Para-Romani as a conversation-level phenomenon. We interpreted the use of group-internal vocabulary items and particular stylistic conventions as an ‘emotive mode’ that serves to flag interlocutors’ shared attitudes and values rather than as a self-contained grammatical system (for a somewhat similar view see already Kenrick 1979). The book under review carries the title *Scandoromani*, using a term introduced by Hancock (1992) in imitation of the more widespread ‘Angloromani’, used to denote the Para-Romani varieties of Britain. That term, in turn, is part of the legacy of a rather undifferentiated nineteenth-century discussion context in which the various speech varieties of ‘Gypsies’ were lumped together regardless of their structural composition, their social function or internal cohesiveness, or their linguistic genealogy. The book’s subtitle suggests that we are dealing not with a Romani dialect as such but with a ‘Mixed Language’, and further that the discussion covers ‘remnants’ of that variety, thus hinting that opportunities for documentation are limited either to particular structures, or to particular individuals.

Gerd Carling is the book’s lead author. Her first publication on a related topic (Carling 2005) was devoted to the influence of Romani on Swedish slang. This was followed by work credited to her research collaborators (Lindell and Thorbjörnsson-Djerf 2008) for which Carling provided editorial support.

Co-author Lenny Lindell stems from the Swedish Traveller community. He is referred to in the book as a “speaker” of the language under discus-

Yaron Matras is Editor of Romani Studies and Professor of Linguistics at the University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9HP, United Kingdom. Email: yaron.matras@manchester.ac.uk

sion and his contribution is flagged (p. xv) as that of a language consultant and author of Appendix II (pp. 218–81). This appendix contains the glossed texts of two fairy tales ('Three brothers' and 'Little Red Riding Hood') translated by Lindell, as well as a very short Gospel excerpt (Luke 15, 11–32) with four parallel translations – the first is by Lindell, while the three others, by two named individuals, are taken from material archived at Oslo University. Co-author Gilbert Ambrazaitis is a phonetician who authored Chapter 2 on the sounds of the language (pp. 24–63). This chapter is based on recordings of co-author Lindell's pronunciation of selected lexical material from Lindell and Thorbjörnsson-Djerf (2008), including what is reported to be Lindell's own allophonic variation (cf. pp. 35ff.), summarised in a series of tables, two wave diagrams, and a single spectrogram. (According to the explanation provided on pp. 24–5, interviews were carried out with two speakers, but recordings – which are vital for any instrumental phonetic analysis – were carried out only with Lindell.)

Appendix I (pp. 103–217) contains a vocabulary. This largely replicates the material presented in Lindell and Thorbjörnsson-Djerf (2008), which is described as having been "collected by native speakers accompanied by a scholar" (p. 103). Comparisons have been added to this material from a number of published and archive sources on Swedish and Norwegian Para-Romani, and individual entries have been annotated based on a small number of additional publications, among them etymological dictionaries as well as the online resource ROMLEX. Together, the two appendices and the phonetic transcriptions of words and intonation contours presented in Chapter 2 contain the bulk of the book's empirical material. This is supplemented by two very brief excerpts labelled "Samples of speech" (pp. 96–9), described as a "narrative after picture series" and a sample of "free speech", both provided by co-author Lindell, containing altogether around 250 glossed words.

The book is thus largely, it appears, a discussion of the idiosyncratic speech of two people, the now deceased Kenth Thorbjörnsson-Djerf, as interpreted by his fellow Swedish Traveller, Lenny Lindell, and Lindell himself. To what extent this material can be taken to represent the actual "remnants of a mixed language" in the sense of a more or less coherent speech variety used within a community, either in the past or at present, still requires clarification through additional documentation work. It is unclear to what extent the material presented in the book represents the everyday speech of the main consultants, or whether it actually reflects their idealised image of a Scandoromani language. Nonetheless, the comparison with other sources on Scandinavian Para-Romani allows at least some degree of contextualisation.

Carling opens Chapter 1 (pp. 1–23) with the claim that the Nordic countries have populations known as "Travellers or Roma". In fact they are known as

Resande (which can be translated as ‘Travellers’) though not actually as *Roma*, unless ‘Roma’ is used as a kind of umbrella substitute for ‘Gypsy’. Section 1.1.2 (pp. 2ff.) then carries the heading “The Scandoroma: Language, culture and identity”, alluding to a distinct ethnic minority by a name that is elsewhere, to my knowledge, unattested, and stating explicitly that its members share “a common language *as well as* a distinct ethnolect of the majority language” (p. 3, emphasis in the original) – thus implying that SR, their “common language”, is separate from Travellers’ distinct way of speaking Swedish.

Much of the book is devoted to the argument that SR is a fully-fledged Mixed Language rather than an in-group lexicon that is embedded into (an ethnolectal variety of) Swedish. Although Table 1.1 (pp. 12–13) and the examples presented in the book clearly show that SR shares many of the procedures of lexical manipulation that are typical of in-group lexicons, such as camouflage affixes and meaning extensions, the absence of extensive phonological distortion strategies leads Carling to argue that lexical manipulation is not a key feature of SR. That reliance on phonological manipulation would be marginal is of course to be expected, since SR draws primarily on foreign (i.e. Romani-derived) lexicon for camouflaging and so it does not require extensive cryptolalic procedures. But SR does show a number of cryptolalic derivational morphemes, such as *-(l)ing* and *-(n)um* (cf. p. 79), which are also common in northern European secret lexicons of the Rotwelsch type. Carling attributes such cryptolalic formations exclusively to “loanwords” that entered the language prior to the emergence of the mixed variety (cf. p. 83), though this remains unconvincing in light of the fact that the plural pronouns *vórsnos* ‘we/us’ and *érsnos* ‘you’ also show camouflage suffixing.

In support of her view that SR is an “autonomous” Mixed Language system, Carling speaks of a “change” from a pre-posed definite article (of the Romani type) to a post-posed definite article (of the Swedish type) in SR (p. 8), thus framing the underlying historical process as a contact-induced typological drift. But since the definite article is not simply modelled on Swedish, but is in fact part of an overall grammatical structure that is entirely and consistently Swedish, Carling’s account of this development is not very convincing, either. On the other hand, her assertion that SR has a double or mixed gender inflection system (p. 65) deserves more careful reflection. Clearly, the productive inflection system is Swedish (neuter vs. non-neuter), yet the presence of counterpart expressions that carry the Romani gender distinction (Carling gives *byskro* ‘male jew’ [*sic.*] and *byskri* ‘female jew’ [*sic.*] as examples) might be seen as remnants of a masculine–feminine system – though I would tend to see this as derivational rather than inflectional in nature (and so by implication as a case of de-grammaticalisation). To support her interpretation Carling introduces the rather intriguing concept of “structural memory” (pp. 82–3); it is

a pity that this notion receives only a single mention and is not developed any further. Overall, appreciation of Chapter 3, “The interdependence of adaptation, derivation, and inflection in a mixed morphology” (pp. 68–90), is hindered by the layout, in which Carling repeatedly juxtaposes SR with inflected Romani (drawing largely on examples of reconstructed Early Romani from Matras 2002 and of Sinte from Holzinger 1993), once again framing the differences as a case of structural change rather than a case of language shift from Romani to Swedish with retention of selected lexicon. Chapter 4 purports to offer an “Outline of syntax” (pp. 91–9) but consists mainly of the material referred to as “samples of speech” (see above). Carling argues that SR deviates from Swedish by allowing optional subject deletion, though this is illustrated by the somewhat unsuitable example of the verb ‘it rains’. An interesting observation relates to optional copula deletion, also attested in Angloromani (Matras 2010: 120). The chapter’s concluding remarks are somewhat hard to digest, as they characterise the use of Swedish lexemes in SR as “code-switching”, which occurs “when the speaker does not recall the Scandoromani lexeme” or is otherwise “under stress” (pp. 95–6). This reveals once again a purist attitude toward a supposed SR prototype that is expected to show consistent use of just Romani-derived vocabulary, a view that seems unrealistic in light of actual recordings of other Para-Romani varieties (cf. Matras 2010).

Carling’s concluding Chapter 5 is a two-page plea, “Support for an autonomous model”. Here she points out that SR shows phonological and inflectional properties that are not found in what others might call the ‘host’ language. This is certainly an observation that is worth reflecting upon, but there are other ways to account for ethnolectal features, and Carling’s effort to frame the idiosyncratic set of reconstructed data as a distinct language comes across as ideological rather than as anchored firmly in a structural or sociolinguistic analysis. Overall the book pays strikingly little attention to various details that might have enriched the discussion of Romani dialects and their historical and contact-linguistic development. For example, it would have been interesting to note the use of the loan-verb adaptation marker *-r-* (from Romani *-ar-*), which is shared with both British Romani and German Romani (Sinte) and appears in SR in Low German loan verbs such as *hilpra* ‘help’, *denkra* ‘think’, and *smek-kra* ‘taste’. Carling ignores this formation, although I had commented on it in my own work (Matras 2010: 75–6) drawing on SR examples from Lindell and Thorbjörnsson-Djerf (2008). Carling takes an interest in dialect classification, offering a rather puzzling chart with the results of a statistical evaluation of the Swadesh list based on entries taken from ROMLEX (p. 20), but she does not comment on other features that link SR to the so-called Northwestern group of Romani dialects, such as the conjunction *tjakk* ‘in order to’ (cf. Sinte *jake* ‘thus’), the particles *nina* ‘too’ and *harga* ‘still, more’, the indefinite *kommoni*

'somebody', the lexical items *moskro* 'police' and *pukka* 'say', and more. There are also misinterpretations: while Carling mentions Low German in passing, in Appendix I she interprets the SR prepositions *to* 'to' and *akkte* 'after' as deriving from (Balkan) Romani *t-o* 'at-the' and *akatar* 'from here', respectively. But these are clearly the Low German prepositions *to* and *achter*, which stand in the company of numerous other particles of Low German origin that are listed in the vocabulary but which Carling fails to identify as such, including *fann* 'from' (Low German *van*), *véder* 'back' (Low German *weeder*), and *ábbo* 'but' (Low German *aber*).

Altogether, then, this volume points to the need for further research. Its value as a documentation resource is only guaranteed inasmuch as the vocabulary items provided by the consultants can be verified based on other published sources or additional fieldwork. An analysis of this kind requires sociolinguistic context and greater attention to detail. Moreover, the seeming commitment to describe SR as an entirely closed and self-contained system comes close to a puristic approach, which bleaches the fascinating dynamism of language mixing in ethnolects and in-group varieties.

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