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*General and Applied Romani Linguistics: Proceedings from the
6th International Conference on Romani Linguistics (review)*

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Book reviews

General and Applied Romani Linguistics: Proceedings from the 6th International Conference on Romani Linguistics. Barbara Schrammel, Dieter W. Halwachs and Gerd Ambrosch (eds.). Lincom: Munich. 2005. ISBN 3-89586-741-1. 190 pp.

Reviewed by Anton Tenser

This is the fourth volume to come out of this series of conferences, and it reflects some of the older trends as well as new directions in the field of Romani Studies. The volume is organized into five sections: (1) dialectology; (2) studies on individual Romani dialects; (3) language change with and without contact; (4) computational linguistics; and (5) sociolinguistics.

The collection opens with “The classification of Romani dialects: A geographic–historical perspective” by Y. Matras. The question of classifying dialects is central to the field of Romani linguistics. Challenging the more traditional “genetic” approach to Romani dialect classification, the author justifies the use of the “geographical diffusion model” in discussing the relationships between dialects. This is all the more significant since Romani is generally considered to be a non-territorial language. Essential to the new model is the idea that membership in a dialect group is not absolute, but rather relative to the specific linguistic features, with the whole network of dialects forming dialect continua. Thus, the article provides a new solid theoretical framework for researching and discussing the dialects of Romani (the framework has since been applied, for instance, in Tenser 2008). The discussion of dialectology by Matras sets the tone for several other articles in the volume, specifically the ones by Igla, Cherenkov, Sechidou, Adiego and Boretzky, all of which in one way or another concern the inter-dialectal variation in Romani. Another field that is naturally high on the list of topics throughout the volume is language contact.

The article by B. Igla discusses the dialectology of the various Sinti-Manuš varieties from different parts of Central and Western Europe. The author discusses both the features that define the group as a whole and the outstanding linguistic features of certain dialects, especially the Piedmontese variety. Igla also compares, where relevant, the Sinti-Manuš linguistic characteristics with those of other dialect groups. The author underscores the surprising homogeneity of the S.-M. Group, as based on the sharing of conservative and innovative phonetic, morphological and lexical features. Among these are the avoidance of vocalic onset, similar treatment of the *-s/-h-* variation, movement from

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synthetic to analytic case marking, and common derivations for time and space adverbs.

L. Cherenkov provides some preliminary details about the Plaščuny dialect. This hitherto undocumented dialect, spoken by a small group residing predominantly in Ukraine, has a somewhat obscure origin. In conclusion Cherenkov establishes the connection between the Plaščuny dialect and the so-called Central dialects of Romani. For further details on this variety, including dialectological comparisons, see Tenser (forthcoming), which lists some of the following features as shared by Plaščuny with the Northern-Central dialects: distribution of *-s/-h-*, the rendering of local deictics *adarde/odorde* 'here/there', and similar loan adaptation morphology for both nouns and verbs.

I. Sechidou is mainly concerned with the description of the Ajios Athanasios dialect found in Greece and its position within the Balkan group of Romani dialects. Similar to the discussion of the Sinti-Manuš group, Sechidou finds that while many innovations found in the Balkan group affect the A. A. dialect, some outstanding conservativisms are particular to A. A. These findings, I believe, are very much consistent with the "geographical diffusion model" discussed in opening article of the volume, placing A. A. at the periphery of the geographical diffusion space.

I. Adiego's article deals with the currently under-described Spanish Caló dialect, using not only the older published sources, but also the data from the author's current fieldwork. The article starts with an excellent critical overview of the sources on Caló and discusses their (un)-reliability. The author then presents a grammatical sketch of the dialect as spoken at present. The comments on loan adaptation morphology and the reorganization of morphological marking in nominal and verbal paradigms are especially valuable.

The article by Z. Lapov starts with a general overview of the demographic, political and sociolinguistic situation of the various Romani groups in Croatia. At the heart of the article is a list of 13 words that have been borrowed from Romani into colloquial Croatian. While the article discusses the possible sources of these loans, giving preference to some dialects in favor of others, I believe this article could benefit from recognizing the trends in the semantic typology of the loans. The author claims that the loans are "scattered" within the Croatian language without a particular logic and cover different aspects of ordinary everyday life" (86). Looking at the list, however, the readers may notice that there are some semantic domains that are more likely to be affected, namely the sexual/indecent domain ("penis", "vagina", "to copulate", "to urinate"), the pejorative domain ("bastard, ruffian", "fool", "peasant, boor", "to stink"), as well as, arguably, the domain of money/profit ("money", "rich man", "cool person", "two" [in a deck of cards]).

In Romani, the verb “more than any other grammatical category, reflects the historical changes that have shaped the language” (Matras 2002: 117). Therefore it is not surprising that the three following articles of the volume are dedicated to contact-induced changes in verb morphology of specific dialects. The first one, by D. Draganova, deals with the analysis of the Turkish TAM verb morphology that has been borrowed by the various dialects found in Bulgaria. This phenomenon has been attested before, for instance in Igla (1989). The important conclusion of the article is that for the dialects no longer in direct contact with Turkish, the borrowed morphology of that language has undergone re-analysis within Romani, gaining some independence from the original Turkish model. In the next article, B. Schrammel offers a study of the different strategies (borrowing and calquing) of incorporating German verbal prefixes and particles into Romani varieties spoken in Austria, namely Austrian Sinti, Burgenland Romani and Austrian Lovari. The processes involved in all three dialects under study are found to be very similar, and the overall conclusion is that in all three cases there is typological convergence of Romani verb derivation patterns towards that of the contact language. For further discussion on the subject see Schrammel (forthcoming.) The third of the set is an article by H. Pirttisaari on the synchronic distribution of inherited and borrowed past-participle morphemes in Finnish Romani. The analysis reveals a paradigm shift such that the distribution of the two sets of morphemes is dependent on the synchronic verb classes, rather than on the etymology of the verbs. The three models that propose to explain the phenomenon are of paradigmatic, functional and typological nature, respectively.

N. Boretzky’s article on metathesis and other sound changes in Romani also tackles the issues of language contact. It corroborates Vennemann’s (1988) theory of syllable-structure change and the concept of consonantal strength using data from various Romani dialects. It is found that the processes of sound change affect the dialects of the North much more so than the Southeastern dialects. This observation may be used to support the idea of the geographical nature of dialectal variation in Romani. The author’s suggestion that the high frequency of metathesis in Romani may be attributed to the lack of written tradition in that language is of interest. I believe it points to the connection between the concept of language stability and the strength of the formal tradition of language usage.

G. Simonsen addresses long-distance language change, so to speak. The article examines several semantic changes in the domain of body parts that took place in Romani since Sanskrit, using examples from Sampson’s (1926) dictionary of Welsh Romani. Three types of uni-directional pathways of semantic change defined by Wilkins (1996) and Heine (1999) are corroborated by the data analyzed in the article.

The article by K. Granqvist is on Computational Linguistics, a topic that is rather new to the field of Romani Studies. It describes the initial stages of an attempt to create a Natural Language Processing engine for Finnish Romani. It is important to mention that Romani, with some agglutinative properties in its morphology, lends itself comfortably to this kind of an endeavor. Finnish Romani might prove to be an especially good choice for a pilot study, since its lexicon is somewhat limited as compared to most Romani dialects. It seems that the author could have gone into more detail in describing the general problem and aim of natural language processing to prepare the more general, non-technical, audience for the discussion.

The Sociolinguistics section opens with an article by V. Friedman on the emerging standardization of Romani in Macedonia, especially within the context of *Roma Times*, a tri-lingual (Romani–Macedonian–Russian) newspaper. The article documents how in a state that is home to many Roma groups, there is a conscious effort on the part of Macedonian Romani scholars and media editors at dialectal compromise. The phenomenon is otherwise not very common among the Romani groups, the usual tendency being to use the author's immediate spoken variety as a base for publications or media productions. Nor does the phenomenon described conform "neatly to the patterns of language planning identified by sociolinguistics over the course of the past several decades," the article states, as the stages of language standardization outlined in the common sociolinguistic models tend to be non-discrete and overlapping when dealing with stateless and non-territorial languages such as Romani.

The volume ends with two articles that have little to do with linguistics in the strict sense. "Sociolinguistic aspects of the language of Roma refugees from Kosovo" by J. Petrović and L. Stefanović is in essence a collection of fieldwork notes with social commentary on the fate of Roma refugees from Kosovo to Vojvodina, Serbia and Slovenia following the 1999 crisis. While the article mentions the attitudes toward the Romani speech varieties on the parts of the speakers, it mostly deals with the issues of ethnic/cultural identity on the part of the recently displaced groups of Roma. The final article, "Communications between Nomadic Gypsy groups" by E. Marushiakova and V. Popov, addresses the problem of communication of three traditionally nomadic Romani groups in Bulgaria—the Bugurdjii, the Kalaidjii and the Kardarashi. Three types of communication are characterized—with the local population, with other nomadic groups, and with the groups of settled Roma. One of the significant points that the authors discuss is the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the groups of Roma, presented as interviewees' stated attitudes toward members of other groups. The article ends by concluding that while the settled groups of Roma tend to extensively borrow linguistic and cultural elem-

ents from the outside population and from other Roma groups, the nomadic groups, by contrast, are fairly conservative and protective of their dialect and tradition.

Ending the volume with two anthropological inquiries is very appropriate, as it marks the beginning of an attempt towards an inter-disciplinary approach in the field of Romani Studies. This approach was reflected in the next conference, 7th International Conference on Romani Linguistics, which took place in 2006 at Charles University, Prague, and was titled *Anthropological Perspectives on the Romani Language*. The preparation of the volume of the proceedings of the 2006 conference should currently be under way.

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