

## PARA-ROMANI IN SCANDINAVIA

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**Abstract.** The study of ‘language contact’ has come very much to the fore in sociolinguistics in recent years, and it is not surprising that Romani, a diaspora language, should receive a good share of attention. Since its very departure from India a millennium ago, its speakers have encountered and interacted with speakers of dozens of other languages, all of which have left their mark. The most extreme cases are the so-called Para-Romani varieties, which have demanded the question, are they Romani with massive non-Romani intrusion, or are they non-Romani languages with more or less Romani intrusion? This is addressed in the present article, which deals with one such para-language, called here Scandoromani. Other para-Romani languages are Angloromani, Scottish Romani, Spanish Romani (Caló), Finish Romani (Kále). Paralanguages are used for communication between members of different language and cultural communities. The paralanguages of Romani are not so well-investigated and described, and the present study brings a new light to the field of Romani linguistics. Para-Romani languages are divided into two big groups: based on Indo-European and based on non-Indo-European languages. In this case, the Scandoromani is based on Indo-European languages and the Crimean-Romani (in Ukraine based on Crimean Tatar) and Kurbetcha (in Cyprus based on Turkish) are based on non-Indo-European languages. The Para-Romani varieties in Europe are preserved through communication between elder generations and children and thousands of children around Europe learn their mother tongue – the variety of Para-Romani through the transmission from parents to children. This gives the hope that those varieties will not despair.

**Keywords:** *Romani, language contact, Scandinavia, identity, cryptolect.*

### Генкок Іан. Параромська мова в Скандинавії.

**Анотація.** Дослідження «мовного контакту» в останні роки вийшло на перший план у соціолінгвістиці, тому й не дивно, що ромській мові, мові діаспори, належить приділяти значну увагу. Відтоді, як вона покинула Індію тисячоліття тому, її носії стикалися та спілкувалися з носіями десятків інших мов, усі з яких залишили в ній свій відбиток. Найбільшою незвичністю вирізняються так звані параромські різновиди, які вимагають питання, чи є вони ромською мовою з великою часткою неромських домішок, чи це неромська мова з більшим чи меншим ступенем домішок ромської? Про це йдеться в цій статті, де висвітлюються проблеми однієї такої парамови, яку місцеві називають скандоромською. Інші параромські мови – це англоромська, шотландська ромська, іспанська ромська (Кало), фінська ромська (Кале). Парамови використовують у своєму спілкуванні представники різних мовних та культурних спільнот. Параромські мови не так добре досліджені та описані, і це дослідження висвітлює нові аспекти ромської лінгвістики. Параромські мови поділяються на дві великі групи: похідні від індоєвропейських і від неіндоєвропейських мов. У цьому випадку скандоромська мова заснована на

індоєвропейських мовах, а кримсько-ромська (в Україні на основі кримськотатарської) та курбетча (на Кіпрі на основі турецької) — на неіндоєвропейських мовах. Параромські різновиди в Європі збереглися завдяки спілкуванню між старшими поколіннями та дітьми, і тисячі дітей по всій Європі вивчають свою рідну мову – різновид параромської мови шляхом її передавання від батьків. Це вселяє надію, що на ці різновиди не чекає занепад.

**Ключові слова:** ромська мова, мовний контакт, Скандинавія, ідентичність, криптолект.

## Introduction

Since an earlier version of this paper appeared some thirty years ago (Hancock 1992), considerably more interest has been shown in the so-called *Para*-varieties of Romani (e.g. Boretzky & Iglu, 1994; Sechidou, 2005; Bakker & Matras, 2013; Carling et al., 2014; Krinkova, 2015). These are not, in fact varieties of Romani despite their names, but are various regional or national languages with more or less Romani-derived (mostly lexical) content. Yet, there is an evident anomaly here; while in his review of Iversen’s *Secret languages of Norway*, Einar Haugen concludes that it is “just a dialect of Norwegian” he goes on to say that the core of its vocabulary goes back to India (1949, p. 391). being of North Germanic descent, no Scandinavian dialect can be shown to have a core of direct lexical retention of Indic origin, yet when we examine Scandoromani<sup>1</sup>, it does indeed appear to have just that. In the normal course of linguistic evolution, we cannot expect a language to start as (in this case, for example) Indo-Aryan, spoken in Asia, to become Germanic and spoken in northern Europe. This apparent shift in genetic affiliation is itself sufficiently aberrant to warrant closer investigation.

The Scandinavian perception of our language has not always been benevolent; an 18th-century Swedish commentary by the Reverend Christfrid Ganander claimed that to be able to speak it, it is necessary to “twitch,” and that the Romani

... mouth and lips [be] big, wide and thick, convenient for the pronunciation of their language, which is rather aspirated and full of “schz” or “Sclawoniska” words, which call for a strong aspiration and a lot of spittle before they can be pronounced. Their pronunciation or sounds and voices are peculiar, loud, sharp, rough and harsh, and also demand twitches of the body and gestures with the hands, before they can be articulated.

And as for our social development, Unn Jørstadt, *Director of the then Norwegian School for Gypsies* concluded her 1972 report entitled “Norway’s Gypsy minority” with the observation that “all of them are just like children. One thing is certain: they need help” (1972, p. 137).

## Research background

### Identity and language maintenance

There is no contemporary Romani population anywhere of solely Indic genetic ancestry. Because wherever Romanies have migrated, we have encountered, and

sometimes formed permanent alliances with, other, non-Romani peoples. This has given rise to newer, syncretic populations which, because of the pervasiveness of the core culture and language, have remained essentially Romani in terms of their own perceived identity; non-Romani groups have usually adjusted to the Roma rather than the reverse, although sufficient non-Romani elements have also been incorporated to affect the broader cultural and linguistic characteristics of each individual group.

In some instances, the Indic element has not been sufficient to keep the overall identity of the group Romani, so that while Romani elements are discernible in the speech of such peoples as the Jenisch in Germany or Switzerland, for example, or the Quinquis in Spain, other factors, both genetic and cultural, are insufficient either for them to think of themselves as Romani, or for them to be regarded as such by members of coexisting populations who do (Hancock, 1991, p. 91).

It is now generally accepted that our ancestors were a mixed population even before the *Teljaripen* (the exodus from northwestern India in our history), and that other peoples, Persians, Armenians, Greeks, &c. were incorporated even before crossing into Europe (the *Nakhipen*) and moving throughout the continent (the *Buxljaripen*), where Western peoples became a part of our genetic history.

## Results and Discussion

Linguistic evidence suggests that there were three major migrations, the earliest travelling the furthest, reaching the northern and western fringes of Europe, including Britain and Scandinavia (and possibly Iberia). The second wave remained in central Europe, while the third were, for the most part, kept in slavery in the Balkans until abolition (*desrrobirèja*) in the mid 19th-century. These are the *Vlax* (“Wallachian”) Roma.

In Scandinavia, as elsewhere in Europe today, the Romani populations consist of first, second and third diaspora immigrants.

Because of the very different historical situations distinguishing the migratory waves, and the resulting linguistic divergence, *Vlax* and non-*Vlax* today share little social interaction, even when they inhabit the same environment. *Vlax* Romanies in Norway numbered less than one hundred according to Unn Jørstad when she published her biased report seventeen years ago, a number which has at least tripled since that time; nevertheless, pedagogical materials have been produced in that country to teach literacy in *Vlax* Romani (e.g. Jansen & Heltveit, 1979; Syverud et al., 1979, Hagatun, 2021). Such publications in Sweden, with its larger *Vlax* population, are more numerous, and have been mainly produced by Skolöverstyrelsen in Stockholm. This discussion is concerned not with the *Vlax* Romani minority in Scandinavia, but with the descendants of the first diaspora, the population generally, though incorrectly, referred to as *Tattare*.

Norbert Boretzky has drawn attention to the fact that in the Romani lexicon, the indigenous (*i.e.* Indic) and the non-indigenous items adhere tenaciously to their respective grammatical paradigms, a characteristic “hardly found in any other

language” (1989, p. 357). While the majority of dialects do indeed retain their basically Indian structure, there are a number of varieties of the language which have survived lexically, but which demonstrate no, or almost no, indigenous grammar and phonology. These include *Lomavren*, the speech of the Armenian “Gypsies” (Finck 1903), *Caló*, spoken in Spain (Tudela 1985), *Angloromani* in England (Acton & Kenrick 1984; Hancock 1984a, 1984b), *Hellenoromani* in Greece (Triandaphyllidis 1923–24), *Tent Gypsy* in Yugoslavia (Uhlik 1941–43) and others. This phenomenon is not restricted simply to Romani; such languages as Mbugu (Goodman 1971), and Shelta (Hancock 1984c, Grant 1994) also appear to consist of lexicons couched in the framework of other languages. It is to this category that Scandoromani also belongs.

Documentation on the various Romani populations in Scandinavia is extensive. The question most frequently addressed in connection with the Tattare concerns their ultimate origins, and the extent to which they are in fact ethnic Romanies, if at all. Little has appeared on the linguistic classification of their speech, which has traditionally been viewed merely as a kind of slang consisting of cryptolectal vocabulary of mainly Romani origin in an entirely Scandinavian grammatical matrix.

Such languages have more relevance to linguistic theory, perhaps, than is at once apparent; first of all, they challenge the traditional genetic approach to language classification. Secondly, they provide useful insights into the maintenance of ethnic identity, as well as into contact phenomena and language attrition, both the focus of scholarly interest at the present time. The variety of Romani belonging to this category for which most theoretical work has been undertaken is Angloromani, which originated in England and which has subsequently spread to other parts of the English-speaking world (Hancock, 1986).<sup>2</sup> It is in fact possible that the origins of Scandoromani may also be traced to Britain, in the light of early contact between the British Isles and Scandinavia, although the processes yielding each possibly differ.

While Romanies may have entered Britain from southern Scandinavia in the first place, as the Jutes had done a thousand years before, the first record of their presence in Denmark indicates that they had been transported to that country by James IV of Scotland, in July, 1505. Their arrival in Sweden via Denmark is dated 1512, and they were being abandoned on the coast of Norway from British ships from 1544 onwards.

According to Bergman (1964, p. 13),

. . . the Scottish and the Swedish Gypsies kept in touch during the 16<sup>th</sup> century . . . in the Swedish National Archives there are two passports for the Tattare, or as he is also called the Egyptian, Anders Faa . . . the name Faa is well-known in Scotland, and has been so (among Gypsies) for a long time. John Faa was the name of perhaps the most romantic Gypsy leader in Scotland, and he even had a poem written in his honour by our Swedish poet Orvar Odd.

Bergman (1964, p. 16) continues:

Nowadays, a distinction is made between *Tattare* and *Zigenare*. This last term is used to refer to descendants of the Gypsies who immigrated in the latter part of the 19th century, mainly

between 1860 and 1880, and later. They are bilingual, and speak both a pure European Gypsy dialect, and Swedish . . . The term *Tattare* is reserved for a less well-defined group of people who live in the same way as the Gypsies, and who no doubt in certain cases are descendants of Gypsies who have mixed with Swedes, but who otherwise, and probably mainly, are descendants of the loose people from whom have come the (contemporary, non-Gypsy) significant group of loiterers.

Lastly, Bergman says (1964, p. 22)

Just as the Spanish Gypsies, after having settled down, mixed their language with the Spanish of the lower classes, with the *germania* of the criminals, etc., so the Swedish Gypsies have also mixed their language with Swedish. Today's Tattare speak a mixture (rotvälska) in which, to be sure, the basis is old Romani, but where the inflectional system of the Gypsy language has been lost.

The language of the Swedish Zigenare, as referred to here, has been superbly described by Gjerdmann and Ljungberg (1963); while no comparable grammar yet exists for the same language in Norway, that dialect is closely related to the one described for Sweden, and work on a linguistic description of Norwegian Vlax (which is the Lovari rather than the Kalderash or Churari dialect spoken in Sweden) is in progress by Lars Gjerde under the supervision of Dr. Knut Kristiansen at Oslo University's Indo-Iranian Institute. The speech of the Swedish Tattare has been recently dealt with in a book by Johansson (1977), while for the Norwegian situation, Iversen's three volume *Secret Languages in Norway* (1944-1950) remains the most comprehensive treatment. I am not dealing with Finland in this paper, but a number of linguistic works describing Fennoromani also exist, *e.g.* by Valtonen, Thesleff, and others.

While Bergman refers to the "mixing" of the Romani and the white populations, and of their languages, he makes no attempt to explain why such mixing should have taken place. No scholars seem yet to have attempted this from a linguistic perspective, although a number of ethnographic studies have been written such as those by Ethler, Heymowski, Bartels & Brun, Hansen, Takman, etc., which examine the ancestries of the Scandinavian Traveller population. The parallel situation in Britain has received more attention in this regard, and it is likely that what we have learned about this may equally apply in Scandinavia. There are two principal hypotheses for the British situation: firstly, that contemporary Angloromani is the result of progressive language attrition or decay—a position favoured by Romanologist Donald Kenrick, and secondly, that it is a deliberately contrived cryptolect dating from the sixteenth century, this being my own belief. I reject the possibility of language attrition because dying Romani dialects, such as that spoken in Wales, are not restructuring themselves; Welsh Romani has not slowly become Angloromani. Nor, in fact, is Angloromani dying, at least in North America, but appears to be spreading, numerically and geographically. I favor a sixteenth century origin for Angloromani because we have numerous references to a "secret language" in use among the Romani population from that time. The fact that no samples of

Angloromani occur in print until the nineteenth century attests only to its secret nature, although it has been used to support the attrition hypothesis; but absence of evidence is not evidence of absence; Shelta (*cf.* Hancock, 1984c) remained hidden from the outside world until the nineteenth century.

I will not repeat detailed arguments supporting my position here, since they have appeared in print elsewhere. But to summarize, it would seem that the newly-arrived Romanies found themselves thrown into the same social milieu as the British outlaws, and were obliged to interact with them for survival. The British outlaws already had a cryptolect of their own, known as Cant, evidence of which may be found in the still surviving speech of the Scottish Travellers (see Hancock, 1986), and, of course, the Roma had Romani as a means of private communication. Cant, which seems to date from the eleventh century, consists of cryptolectal items in an all-English grammatical and phonological framework. It has been used for poetry in the past, and some words, such as *booze*, *gear*, *hooker*, etc., have passed into general English slang. The Roma were not opposed to allowing Romani items to be incorporated into Cant, and no doubt learnt that speech themselves, but withheld inflected Romani from the non-Romani community, in order to be able to maintain their separateness within the larger separate population. The inflected language survived in England and America until the early twentieth century; by the mid-nineteenth century, Smart & Crofton (1875) were able to transcribe stories from British Romanies told first in inflected Romani and then in Angloromani.

The restructured language in Scandinavia appears to exist in several regional dialects; Johansson discusses two for Sweden, a Northern and a Skånish dialect, the differences between which appear to be mainly lexical. Phonologically and structurally, Scandoromani, or *Tattarespråk*, approximates almost completely to the Scandinavian host languages in the midst of which it exists. It is in its lexicon that it remains distinctively a Romani tongue. As with Angloromani, native morphology has undergone a process of collapse—taking the attritionist argument—or never existed in the first place, if Romani items were inserted into a co-existing Cant. We might still speak of reduction, however. For example, in Angloromani, the first-person personal pronominal forms all derive from the historical postpositional case *mande*, used following various prepositions (e.g. *mandi* ‘I, me’, *mandi’s* ‘my’, etc.). The Scandoromani forms on the other hand have generalized equivalents based on the possessive singular masculine nominative in the inflected language, (*miro*), thus *miro* ‘I, me’, *miros* ‘my’, etc. Nearly all other morphology seems to be attributable to vernacular Scandinavian, for example reflecting their three-gender system rather than the two genders of the standard languages. Inflected forms appear to be frozen, e.g. *dakkri* ‘mother’, a genitive in historical Romani. Derivational morphemes are in the main non-productive, with the exception of the historical genitive, typically used in the inflected northern dialects such as Sinti or Welsh Romani as a means of lexical expansion. Examples from Scandoromani include *däkkaskiro* ‘soldier’, from *däkka* ‘sword’, *minnsjeskre* ‘gonorrhoea’, from *minnsja* ‘vulva’, *bängerske* ‘hell’, from *bäng* ‘devil’, *dikkopaskro* ‘mirror’, from *dikka* ‘to see’, and so on. Calques on Scandinavian languages also account for some forms. Examples include *sapp-jakkad*

‘wicked’, literally ‘snake-eyed’, from *ormøgd*, ditto, or *ali-jakkar* ‘spectacles, glasses’, literally ‘glass-eyes’, cf. *glasøgon*, ditto. Other lexical items have been created by a process of incoining, i.e. combining existing morphemes into new lexical combinations. Examples include *krajjo-dikklo* ‘flag’, literally ‘king cloth’, *starrtomossj* ‘policeman’, literally ‘capture person’, *randrar-mossj* ‘secretary’, literally ‘write person’, and *bassjar-mossj* ‘musician’, literally ‘play person’, *pilo-dukt* ‘having a hangover’, literally ‘drunk-pained’, *rubbsmitto* ‘silversmith’, is an example of a Romani and a Scandinavian derived morpheme in combination. Items from Scandinavian and Scandinavian Cant are also common in Scandoromani, usually in disguised form. Thus *fimmpus* ‘five’, *dustus* ‘flour’, *varsnos* ‘our’, *ersnos* ‘your’, *alonum* ‘alone’, (from *fern*, *dust*, *vur*, *er* and *alones*). This can even extend to Indian-derived items, e.g. *jekkum* ‘one’ (from *jekh*) or *nakkus* ‘nose’ (from *nakh*).

Following are three sentences in Swedish Scandoromani with their Angloromani, inflected Romani, English, and Swedish equivalents:

Scandoromani: *miro honkar alonum; mander honkar alonum*  
 English: ‘I am alone’  
 Swedish: *jag är ensam*  
 Angloromani: *mandi’s alonus; mandi’s akonya*  
 Romani: *me šom kokoro*

Scandoromani: *vi tradrar to fåron en vaver divvus*  
 English: ‘we(‘ll) go to town another day’  
 Swedish: *vi åker till stun en annan dag*  
 Angloromani: *we’ll tradder to the forus a wavver divvus*  
 Romani: *džasa ka o foros vaver dives*

Scandoromani: *ska vi puttja dälle mossj om han vill suta palla i ratti?*  
 English: ‘shall we ask that fellow if he’ll stay and sleep tonight?’  
 Swedish: *ska vi fråga den där karlen om han vill ligga kvar i natt?*  
 Angloromani: *will we putch the mush if he’ll atch and suti to-rati?*  
 Romani: *pučas i muršeste te ačel te sovel akarat?*

## Conclusion

The question has arisen whether languages of this type may be said to have undergone processes of pidginization or creolization (discussed in Hancock, 1971). Although Arnbjørnsdottir & Smith (1986) attempt an argument against this in their discussion of Russenorsk, there is in fact no incontrovertibly attested case of the kind of linguistic restructuring typifying these processes which has arisen from the contact of just two languages; nor has what Whinnom called “tertiary hybridization” occurred, i.e., when the speakers of the language supplying the lexicon subsequently withdraw from the contact environment, the pidgin then having to expand using its own internal grammaticalizing and lexicalizing resources rather than drawing upon its lexifier for these components. When two language communities come into contact, speakers of one usually just learn that of the other (e.g. Saami and Norwegian in

Norway, Spanish and English in Texas) with cross-interference, but generating no extensive structural or semantic innovations having no outside source. These processes have been discussed by the Scandinavian linguists Jespersen (1922) and Hjelmslev (1939); Reinecke (1937) tabulated at least ten social contexts which can yield contact languages, whether pidginized or not (discussed in Hancock, 1990), those of the Scandoromani type being most like his category of “foreigners’ mixed speech”, although he discusses restructured Romani in particular under the heading “dying minor languages” (Reinecke 1937, p. 76-79), thereby adhering to the attrition hypothesis.

Scandoromani, like Angloromani and probably other such varieties, does not appear, then, to have evolved in direct descent from historical inflected Romani by a process of linguistic decay, but instead is based upon sociolectal varieties of Scandinavian—Norwegian in Norway, Swedish in Sweden, Danish in Denmark, whose speakers drew upon an early (though now extinct) coexistent inflected Romani which served as a lexical reservoir for maintaining and enriching it as a cryptolectal register. In light of claims that have been made for both Angloromani and for Caló or Hispanoromani (Hancock, 1990a, p. 96-97), however, regarding the nature of the Romani element in each, this explanation may require elaboration.

Whatever its ultimate origins, in the course of time, Scandoromani came to replace inflected Romani as the ethnic language of the community, we might guess because of increasing intermarriage with gadje, but surviving because of the continuing identity of the group as Romani, and the resulting need for a linguistic means of reinforcing that identity, and to provide a protective insulation from the establishment—in this context functioning as an antilanguage (Halliday, 1968; Hancock, 2021). Language maintenance and choice as a factor of ethnic identity is discussed in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985). For these reasons, as long as the Scandoromani population remains a distinct segment of the Scandinavian population, it is likely that their speech will survive in some form also.

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup>*Scandoromani*, like *Angloromani*, *Fennoromani*, *Hellenoromani*, *Hispanoromani*, etc., is an academic term, and not one used by its speakers themselves.

<sup>2</sup>The extent to which *Para*-forms may differ from the original Romani is exemplified with the Angloromani word for “eggs:” *yoras* ([ˈjɔrɔz]), in Common Romani *anrre* ([ã:ˈkə]). The AR form has the accreted Northern Romani initial [j-], the 18th-century southern British *English*-language shift of [a]/[æ] to [ɒ]/[ɔ] (indicative of English dominance by this time), English stress-placement, and the English plural {-s}. The CR form reflects nasalization of the first vowel from an underlying [n].

I have retained the exonym *Gypsy/-ies* only where it occurs in published sources. I use the label *Romani(es)* as a collective, since not all Romani *endaja* (subgroups)

refer to themselves as *Roma*, and for whom it means “husbands.” In Vlax, the plural endonym is both *Roma* and *Rom* (*Rroma*, *Rrom*).

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