

Romų kalba. [The Romani language]. Vida Beinortienė. Panevėžys: Panevėžio vaiku dienos užimtumo centras. 2011, 260 pp. ISBN 978-609-95266-0-7.

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Romų kalba ('The Romani language') is the result of the author's long interest in the language of Roma people and her work with them in the town of Panevėžys in northern Lithuania. The book consists of a grammatical description, a corpus of texts translated from Lithuanian to Romani by native speakers and transcribed by the author, and Romani–Lithuanian and Lithuanian–Romani vocabularies.

In the last decade the investigation of Lithuanian Romani has intensified. The description of the dialect by Tenser (2005) and his PhD dissertation devoted to the North-Eastern group of Romani dialects (2008) provide high-level analyses of the data collected during fieldwork and from the Romani Morpho-Syntax Database (<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/rms/>). Czerenkow (2009) discusses some unique features of Lithuanian Romani such as the use of the locative instead of the traditional ablative or of Slavic Aktionsart prefixes which, however, follow the Lithuanian pattern. Beinortienė's book holds a specific place among the literature on Lithuanian Romani not only as the first attempt to describe the Romani grammar in Lithuanian since 1936 (Salys and Kisinas 1936; re-published in Toileikis (comp.) 2001) but also as a source providing data for further analysis of the dialect.

A few words should be said with regard to the spelling adopted in this book: although it is based on the alphabet developed in the elementary book of Romani (Bogdanovičienė and Prosnjakova 2003), which is itself based on Lithuanian spelling, some decisions raise doubts. For instance, the letter *ē* proposed for the sound [ə] can be easily confused with the traditional notation of a long vowel. Another shortcoming is that the palatalised consonants even in the position not before *e, i* are marked unsystematically (cf. *belvel* [bel'v'el'] 'evening' and *kerdziapē* 'happened'). Bearing this in mind, examples cited from the book will retain the author's spelling.

The description of Romani grammar is structured according to Lithuanian grammar. As a result, the descriptive part of the book is inferior to the works of Tenser or Cherenkov. Some issues are not discussed at all, for example, there is no mention of articles in Romani (since articles do not exist in Lithuanian), though they can be found in the Romani texts of the book.

The actual use of gerund constructions discussed on p. 55 raises certain doubts. The author gives an example of constructions like *Ponasvaladyji dake*,

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čhavo jačjapē siemiakro šēro ‘When the mother got ill, the boy became the head of the family’ where the subject of the clause with the gerund is expressed by the dative. However, though gerunds are quite frequent in the texts of the book (see below) I have not found any examples of such constructions. They seem to be calqued on Lithuanian *Susirgus motinai sūnus tapo šeimos galva* ‘id.’ and probably would be considered strange and ungrammatical by Roma speakers. However, such constructions should be considered in further investigations of the dialect.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that this dialectal variety is more “lithuanised” than the versions spoken in Vilnius and the south of Lithuania (e.g. Eišiškės). For example, a common suffix *-im*, of Greek origin (Matras 2002: 75), used to derive abstract nouns, co-exists in the dialect with *-um* of Lithuanian origin: *čist-im-a* ‘cleanliness’, *temn-um-a* ‘darkness’ and lith. *tams-um-a* ‘id.’

The book contains interesting material to develop the discussion of verbal prefixes in Lithuanian Romani, which was started by Tenser (2005: 34–5) and Czerenkow (2009). The list of verbal prefixes provided in this book seems to include all commonly used prefixes in this dialect. Rich material illustrates the cases discussed by Czerenkow (2009) where the use of a certain prefix (even of Slavic origin) follows the Lithuanian verbal pattern: *pa-dykh-* ‘see’, rus. *u-vid-* ‘see’, pol. *zo-bacz-* ‘id.’ and lith. *pa-mat-* ‘see.’ The data from texts and dictionaries show that sometimes double prefixes can be used as well (cf. *poza-bistryrdzia* ‘forgot’ and rus. *poza-był* ‘id.’). Some examples of the use of prefixes *nu-*, *uš-* and *su-* directly borrowed from Lithuanian are mentioned as well.

The book also describes some features typical to Russian Romani which might be another sign of the increasing influence of neighbouring languages. Although Tenser evidences only synthetic future forms for Lithuanian Romani (2008: 140), Beinortienė’s data give some examples of complex future forms identical to ones in Russian Romani: *lava tē džou* ‘I will go.’ It seems that in Lithuanian Romani long forms (*-a*) of verbs always express future tense; however, some examples with present meaning are also provided, for example, *chala syvo grastoro* ‘the gray horse is eating’. Interesting examples of numerals found in Russian Romani are cited in this book as well: *bitrinengiro biš* ‘seventeen’. The book attests some previously undocumented forms such as the analytic comparative made with the help of Russian *iščo* ‘else, more’: *iščo šukar* ‘more beautiful’. However, another variant of the form *iščo šukaredyr* ‘id.’ seems to be more regular.

A very interesting part of the book is the corpus of texts. Almost all publications of Lithuanian Romani handle separate words and sentences out of context. The texts published in this book provide a great opportunity to take a better look at some aspects of syntax and the use of grammatical forms. However, it should be kept in mind that most texts are translated from Lithuanian and, as

a result, possess some features probably influenced by the source language. The high frequency of non-finite forms in the texts is an example of this influence. The system of participles is highly complex in Lithuanian. The frequent appearance of gerund constructions (*-i* and *Vndoj* forms) in the text is probably triggered by the Lithuanian originals. In the literature it has already been stated that *-i* forms tend to express completed action, and *Vndoj* continuous action (Tenser 2008: 151). It can be noted that gerund forms with Aktionsart prefixes are likely to express the action before the one expressed by finite verbs (e.g. *jonē giji strečindē raznonēn zvieren* ‘while walking, they met various animals’ and *podykhji dava komediĵa, murša phēnēn . . .* ‘after they saw this comedy, they said . . .’). On the other hand, the gerund forms can play the role of independent predicates, independent from the clause with the finite verb *nahara užakirindoj javja vavro leskro pšal* ‘some time later (lit. not for long waiting) his other brother came’. The gerunds can also be used as predicates in simple sentences: *Dava manuš gvaltyndoj khērē* ‘this man is shouting at home’. A weak position for the use of gerunds is after the finite verb: sometimes it is hard to understand if the particular use of the gerund form is a converb or a part of an infinitive construction. The use of gerund in the infinitive construction would be a great contribution to the discussion of the development of the “new infinitive” in Romani (see Matras 2002: 161–2); for instance, *me i gijom rodyji strach, ale nikaj nane* ‘I went looking for fear/to find fear, but there is [no fear] anywhere.’

The Romani–Lithuanian (4,400 words) and Lithuanian–Romani (4,200 words) vocabularies added at the end of the book are undoubtedly the largest lists ever published for the language of Lithuanian Roma. An advantage is that they have been edited by a native speaker, Rada Bogdanovič, who had earlier compiled a small list of Romani words (Toleikis 2001). Previous lists such as those given in Narbutt (1830), Dowojno-Sylwestrowicz (1889) and Pogodin (1902) lack the editor’s work and, as a result, contain many mistakes. For instance, Pogodin (1902) provides some words and meanings which simply are jokes of the language consultants, cf. *ebul* ‘widow’ < *e bul* ‘buttocks’ (see Shapoval 2010). The other feature of these vocabularies is their “lithuanian-ness”: while in other known lists of Lithuanian Romani words no borrowings from Lithuanian were presented, this one contains several dozen lexical borrowings from Lithuanian. Most of them are nouns (e.g., *atostogi* ‘holidays’ < lith. *atostogos* ‘id.’) and verbs (*nuominēs* ‘rent’ < lith. *nuomoti* ‘id.’). Only one borrowed conjunction *nas* ‘because’ < lith. *nes* ‘id.’ was found. One more interesting thing about Lithuanian loanwords is that usually Lithuanian masculine nouns are borrowed in the palatalised form of the stem, e.g., *dviračio* ‘bike’ < lith. *dviratis*, gen. *dviračio* ‘bike’. This could be influenced by the genitive form of masculine as its ending *-o* is identical to the usual ending of the borrowed

nouns in Romani. The use of the oblique stem of the borrowed nouns would explain the form of the well-known borrowing *rudzen* ‘autumn’ < *ruduo*, gen. *rudens* ‘id.’

The largest shortcoming of the vocabularies is that sometimes forms of the same lexeme are given separately (*cha* ‘eat (imp.)’ and *chas* ‘eat’). The same word can be given several times because of different pronunciation (*Kouna* and *Kouno* ‘Kaunas’ or borrowings *prativno* and *pracivno* ‘repulsive’). For reasons of pronunciation, several words are spelt differently in the vocabulary lists from the way adopted in the book, e.g. *bynk* ‘devil’, which is given as *beng* in the book. Such transcriptions based on the phonetic principle can lead to mistakes in the grammar, e.g. *čhip* ‘language’, whose voiceless *p* is an alternant of *b* in the word-final position, is provided with the plural form *čhipa* ‘languages’ instead of the correct *čhiba*. In addition, there are some incorrect or non-exact translations, e.g. *des do bul herate* lit. ‘kick someone’s ass’ is translated as ‘kick someone’s bell’.

Synonyms of different origins are provided in the dictionary: it can be a Romani word and a borrowing, e.g. *goj* and *kolbaso* ‘sausage’, or borrowings from different languages *krenco* and *kučeriavo* ‘curly’. Apart from direct borrowing of words, there are examples of calquing, e.g. *paniprolydžaišnnytko* ‘plumbing’ from rus. *vodoprovod* ‘id.’ Newly constructed words can also be found, e.g. *jagitkire* ‘matches’.

To conclude, it should be said that Beinrotienė’s book gives not only a great opportunity for further investigation of the dialect but also reflects the state of affairs in which Romani is developing in modern Lithuania. The dialect seems to be increasingly affected by neighbouring languages. Lithuanian, being nowadays the official language of the state, plays a larger role in the social life, which makes it a source for active borrowings into the local dialect of Romani.

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