
Reviewed by Viktor Elšík

The publication under review is a brief morphological description of the Romani dialect spoken by the Muzikanti ‘Musicians’ of Ljaskovec, a town in the province of Veliko Târnovo in north-central Bulgaria. The dialect may be classified as one of the so-called Drindari varieties, which form a subgroup of a well-defined group of Balkan Romani that has been variously referred to as the Southern Balkan II (e.g. Boretzky 2000), Drindari–Bugurdži–Kalajdži (e.g. Matras 2002), or Balkan ‘zis’ group (e.g. Elšík & Matras 2006). Angačev’s monograph is in fact the first comprehensive account of the morphology of any Drindari variety. Other sources on the dialect include an unpublished dissertation on the variety of Kotel (Kenrick 1969); several articles with texts and grammatical commentaries (Gilliat-Smith 1914, 1925, 1931, 1962, Kenrick 1967); and questionnaire data on several varieties (e.g. of Sliven and Šumen) that are available on the website of the Manchester Romani Project (http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/rms).

The book opens with a very brief introduction (a few lines on p. 3). We learn that the author describes his own variety of Romani but we are not told whether the description is based solely on native introspection, or on linguistic fieldwork methods as well. Also missing is any information on the sociocultural and linguistic background of the speakers, and so we do not know, for example, what the variety’s current contact languages are: only Bulgarian, or also Turkish? The author cites the view that all subgroups of the Muzikanti, who presently inhabit several towns in central and eastern Bulgaria, originate in the town of Kotel, which they had presumably left after a conflagration in 1894. This suggests that the internal diversification of the Drindari dialects is relatively recent, which, incidentally, does not seem to be compatible with Boretzky’s (2000: 107) claim that “at the time around 1900 no uniform Drindari existed.” Although the reader is not told what autonym the Muzikanti of Ljaskovec use, there is a hint in one of the grammatical chapters: the abstract noun ɬomajč–ip‘i ‘Gypsyhood’ (p. 107). This noun is likely to be derived from a reflex of the compound *ɬomani+čhelj ‘Gypsy clan’, one of the old Romani autonyms, which is typical of Romani groups in the western margins of Europe but also attested in a few Balkan dialects of Romani (cf. Matras 2004: 66–68; Marushiaškova & Popov 2004: 154–155). This is most likely also the origin of the (plural) form ɬomajća, the autonym of the Muzikanti of Kotel (Kenrick 1969: 115).
which Boretzky (2000: 106) interprets as involving a Greek-origin derivational suffix.

The introduction is followed by several notes on orthography (p. 4). The author employs the Cyrillic script and the Bulgarian graphemic rules to write Romani. He consistently uses the grave accent on vocalic graphemes to indicate stress in polysyllabic words and designs several novel digraphs for sounds that are lacking in Bulgarian: the retroflex rhotic /pp/ [ɽ] and the aspirated consonants /kʰ/, /pʰ/, /tʰ/, /tsʰ/ and /ʧʰ/ [ʧʰ]. The author’s orthography is predominantly phonological, though it mostly does not reflect word-final devoicing and consonant cluster simplification, e.g. руб [ruf] and бакт [vas] (but cf. бак on p. 41).

The grammatical description is purely synchronic, with occasional notes on the origin of loan-words. The core of the book is divided into four chapters: on nominals (pp. 5–52), verbs (pp. 53–85), uninflected words (pp. 86–105), and word formation (pp. 106–121). The format of the grammar is fairly traditional, especially with regard to the division of words into lexical classes. The nominal chapter covers the inflection of the definite article, the inflectional categories and paradigms of nouns, the formation and inflection of different kinds of pronouns, the inflection and comparison of adjectives, and the formation and inflection of numerals. The verbal chapter deals with the inflection of the copula, inflectional paradigms of verbs, negation, voice, and “impersonal” forms, including participles, gerunds and modal expressions. The chapter on uninflected words discusses different kinds of adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, and other particles. The final chapter describes the derivation of abstract nouns, diminutives and relational adjectives, valency morphology of verbs, and the adaptation of loan-verbs. There are numerous tables of sample paradigms throughout the book and most sections contain rich illustration of the described structures by sentential examples, which are translated into Bulgarian but unglossed.

The monograph stands out in presenting morphological details that are often neglected in Romani grammars. For example, the nominal chapter contains a whole section, a large table in fact, that classifies over 180 indigenous “consonantal” nouns (i.e. nouns without an overt inflection in their base form) according to their gender and word-final consonant (pp. 10–14), which are criteria that are relevant for nominal inflection. Also welcome is the complete overview of spatial adverbs, including their directive and separative forms, e.g. kutk’a ‘there’, kudur’ig ‘to there’.

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1 In this review I employ the IPA symbols for the stress position and the retroflex rhotic, and the usual transcription of aspirates by means of digraphs involving an /h/.
and *khujt'ak* ‘from there’; or *opr'ə* ‘above’, *naopr'ə* ‘to above’, and *opr'al* ‘from above’ (pp. 86–90). On the other hand, certain morphological categories are underanalyzed or not dealt with at all. For example, there is no mention in the relevant chapters of the subjunctive mood in verbs or of the derivation of nouns denoting trees from nouns denoting their fruits, although uncommented-upon instances of such categories may be encountered (cf. p. 102 for the subjunctive and p. 9 for the tree derivations). Likewise, only examples make it clear that some masculine nouns allow number neutralization in the nominative, e.g. *kan* ‘ear / ears’ and *vas* ‘hand / hands’ (pp. 12–13), and that there is a specific plural reflexive, cf. *pen-dər* ‘from themselves’ (p. 31).

A rather serious shortcoming is the lack of any discussion of the function of morphological categories. For example, the only information on the semantics of tense–aspect categories the reader obtains are the labels used in tables of verbal paradigms: see (1) for the original Bulgarian terms, their English equivalents, and examples of third-person singular forms of the verb *ker*– ‘to do’ (cf. pp. 72–73). Since the author’s labels for Romani tense–aspect categories coincide with those used in the grammatical tradition of Bulgarian, one wonders whether there is also an equivalence of functions between the two languages. Are we supposed to assume that the range of uses of, say, the (cross-dialectally unusual) Romani Perfect is identical to that of the Bulgarian Perfect?

(1) | BULGARIAN TERM | ENGLISH TERM | ROMANI EXAMPLE |
---|---|---|---|
сега̀шно | Present | *kərlə* |
миналo нѐсвършено | Imperfect | *kərləs* |
миналo свършено | Aorist | *kerj'as* |
миналo предварително | Pluperfect | *kerj'asəs* |
миналo неопределенo | Perfect | *kerj'astər* |
бъдещe | Future | *ma kərəl* |
бъдещe в мина̀лото | Future in the Past | *ma kərləs* |

The author’s synchronic classification of verbs into four major inflectional classes (viz. *a*-, *e*-, *i*– and *ə*-verbs) plus several subclasses is based solely on non-perfective inflections (pp. 56–74). While there is a separate section on the imperative (pp. 79–80), perfective classification does not receive an explicit treatment and must be inferred from the sample paradigms. I have been able to identify nine synchronic perfective classes on the basis of different paradigmatic combinations of the (historically) non-palatalized and palatalized allomorphs of the perfective suffix, e.g.
-d- ~ zero. Many of these have further subclasses due to different patterns of stem allomorphy.

The dialect has undergone numerous sound developments, which have significantly reduced some of its forms (my favourite example is zab’aj < *giljaban’i ‘she sang’). Importantly, many of these developments have given rise to synchronic allomorphy, with the resulting alternations often being predictable on phonological grounds. For example, the complementary distribution of the nominative plural allomorphs -i ~ -ə, both < *-e, is conditioned by the stem-final consonant or, rarely, the stress position, cf. gon-’i ‘sacks’ vs. goš-’ə ‘dungs’ and lok-’i ‘light PL’ vs. l’ak-ə ‘her(s) PL’. Given the omnipresence of morpho-phonological alternations in the morphological structure of the dialect, the reader would certainly profit from a separate chapter on morpho-phonology.

There is no space in this review for a dialectological analysis of the valuable data provided by the monograph. However, I would like to point out some unusual and unique features of the dialect. Several etymons that are not obvious European loanwords are, as far as I am aware, unattested elsewhere in Romani, e.g. xong ‘incense’. There are also several unusual and etymologically obscure affixes: -t’ak, which marks separative orientation in pronominal adverbs, cf. khə-t’ak ‘from where’, khəkə-t’ak ‘from here’, khuj-t’ak ‘from there’, and khajmu-t’ak ‘from somewhere’ (p. 87); -č’ij, which derives nouns denoting trees from nouns denoting their fruits, e.g. ambrol-’ə ‘pear tree’ (p. 9); -im’atər, which derives (action) nominalizations from verbs and some classes of adjectives, e.g. nang’u ‘naked’ → nanz-im’atər ‘getting naked’ (pp. 106–111); and -m’uja < *-monja (cf. Elšik 2000, Matras 2002: 113–116, Boretzky & Igla 2004: 106), which marks indefiniteness in the adverb khaj-m’uja ‘somewhere’ (p. 86). Finally, there are several instances of unusual analogical developments in inflectional paradigms, such as the partial acquisition of demonstrative inflection by the deictic adjective kis’ov ‘such’, e.g. plural kis-al’-i (p. 34); the reshaping of non-perfective first-person plural forms in analogy to the first-person singular, e.g. x’asə ‘we eat’ (← x’aas ‘I eat’) vs. x’asə ‘you eat’; and more.

Despite the few shortcomings, many of which may be in fact attributed to the brevity of the publication, Angăčev’s monograph offers sound linguistic analysis and clear presentation of the data and represents a most welcome contribution to the

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2 Boretzky (2000: 126), who cites -imatar from Colocci (1889), suggests that the suffix is most likely a deformed variant of the well-attested plural abstract marker -inata. Nevertheless, the shift to the singular in Colocci’s and Angăčev’s varieties remains to be accounted for.
grammatical description of Drindari. I certainly recommend the book to any specialist in Balkan Romani and Romani dialectology in general.

References


Manchester Romani Project: http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/  