

Retentions of Indo-Aryan grammatical elements in Norwegian Para-Romani: The pronominal system

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Abstract

The present article sets out to describe the system of personal pronouns in Norwegian Para-Romani.* As we shall see, the pronominal system constitutes one of the few remnants of original Indic elements in the grammatical lexicon of Norwegian Para-Romani. In Norwegian Para-Romani, the original Indo-Aryan grammar, morphology and syntax have, with few exceptions, been replaced with Norwegian ones. However, the personal pronouns originate in possessive pronouns in original Romani.

This article has three parts. First, I give a brief introduction to the notion of Para-Romani itself and specifically to the Norwegian variety. Secondly, I give a description of the pronominal system. Thirdly, I place the data in a semantic-diachronic frame.

Keywords: Norwegian Para-Romani, mixed languages, person markers, diachronic semantics.

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1. Norwegian Para-Romani

1.1 General

The Romani language, as well as its original speakers, the Roma, originates in north-western India, from where they emigrated ca. 1000 years ago. Romani is thus an Indo-Aryan language. The first Roma are assumed to have settled in the Byzantine Empire before the eleventh century AC, and later settled across Europe in different waves. Today, Romani is spoken in different branches throughout Europe.

Scholars make one essential distinction when referring to Romani. This is a differentiation between the so-called Para-Romani varieties, as opposed to the Romani varieties. I will now turn to what differentiates them.

1.1.1 Romani vs. Para-Romani

The language originally spoken by the Roma is Romani, a language that belongs to the central branch of the Indo-Aryan languages. Romani is today spoken by between 5 and 10 million people scattered around the world, most of them in Eastern Europe. It is divided into several dialectal branches in Europe (for a detailed account, see Matras 2002), and has official status in twelve countries, including Norway and Sweden.

In certain areas, the Roma have been integrated (forcefully, in some cases), to the extent that the majority language has become their mother tongue, and Romani is generally preserved only as a lexical, not a grammatical variety. Such developments have taken place in e.g., Basque, Catalan, English, German, Greek, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish-speaking areas, in addition to the Norwegian-speaking area (cf. Bakker 1995: 126). These varieties will here be referred to as Para-Romani varieties. Note that the term is disputed; such varieties have been labelled mixed languages, bilingual mixtures and Creole languages (cf. e.g. Matras *et al.* 2008 for discussion). However labelled, these varieties share one essential feature: their original syntax, morphology and phonology have been replaced with those of the majority language, but have kept parts of the original Indo-Aryan vocabulary. What remains is thus a variety in

which the grammar and phonology are inherited from the surrounding majority language, but with Romani items inserted into that language's frame. This may make it difficult to understand for outsiders. I now turn to the Norwegian variety.

1.1.2 Norwegian Para Romani

The Norwegian and Swedish Para-Romani varieties have been labelled Scandoromani (cf. e.g. Matras 2002), a useful term I have however chosen not to employ here because the present data mainly stem from Norwegian. In Norwegian Para-Romani, Norwegian syntax, morphosyntax, morphology and phonology have replaced the original Romani ones. For the sake of example, consider the following sentence:¹

- (1) *Jik volta kadde mero kaben*
 jik volta ka-dde mero kabe-n
 one time eat-1SG.PRET I food-SG.DEF
 'Yesterday I ate the food'

Though the sentence is impossible to understand for speakers of Norwegian, it makes sense if we study its structure in detail. First of all, the syntax is Norwegian. This is exemplified through the inverted subject. Morphologically, the Norwegian patterns are visible as well. The conjugation of the verb 'eat', which has the form *ka* in the verb stem, follows a productive past tense pattern in Norwegian; *ka-kadde*, which is inflected like Norwegian *ha-hadde* ('to have', 'had'). The noun is followed by a suffix *-n* marking definiteness, as in Norwegian nouns in the masculine gender. Crucially, the pronoun, *mero*,² is not of Norwegian origin, as we shall see in section 2.

However, while the inflexional system has largely disappeared,

- 1 Please note that though the sentence was rendered by informant nr. 5, it is not in itself evidence that it actually would be used spontaneously. For discussion on the methodological issues, cf. 2.1.1.
- 2 Note that orthographic *mero* alternates with *miro* in the secondary sources I have consulted. I chose the orthography *mero*, while acknowledging that there may be dialectal variation on this point.

there still exists a derivational word formation pattern, which remains productive in Norwegian and Swedish Para-Romani. This pattern has the form of the suffix *-epa*, and can be exemplified as follows:

- (2) *barvalo* ‘rich’ *losjano* ‘happy’
 barval-epa ‘richness’ *losj-epa* ‘happiness’

Interestingly, the same pattern has been preserved in other Para-Romani varieties such as Angloromani (Matras, p.c.) and Spanish Para-Romani (Caló) (Bakker 1995: 131). We therefore observe that whereas the entire inflexional system has disappeared to that of the surrounding majority language, a derivational process has been retained, alongside the pronominal system. This is particularly puzzling since the explanation for the mere existence of Para-Romani varieties has been said to be that of identity flagging and secretiveness (cf. Matras et al. 2008: 19). How the preservation of a word formation pattern may serve such a function is unclear.

1.2 The Norwegian Travellers

The present article treats the Norwegian Para-Romani variety, spoken by the community known as *tatere*, who will henceforth be referred to as *Travellers*. Since there is widespread confusion in Norway as to what distinguishes *tatere* from *sigøynere* (the latter being the Norwegian term for ‘Gypsy’), and to what extent their languages are related, I will briefly define these terms. Scholars assume that the Roma reached northern and western Europe in the fifteenth century. This wave of Roma immigrants is today referred to as *tatere* (Travellers) in Norway. They have to a large extent been integrated into the Norwegian society, and no longer lead a nomadic lifestyle. However, they have been subject to extensive harassment by the Norwegian government, such as sterilization and abduction of children, as well as racism in Norwegian societies. Their mother tongue is now Norwegian, but they also speak Para-Romani inside their own community. The self-designation of most members of the community is *tater*, contrary to what many might think; the

designation *tater* is widely seen to be pejorative, but is not necessarily so to the members of the community.

The Gypsies, on the other hand, entered Norway ca. 100 years ago and continue to arrive. They have been integrated to very differing extents, and some still speak an inflected form of Romani (cf. 1.1.1). Due to racism and scepticism, also reflected in the public debate, they made a public appeal in the spring of 2008 to have their designation changed from *Gypsy* to *Rom-folket*: the Roma people.

The extent to which there do exist fluent speakers of Romani in the Traveller community in Norway is unclear: nor do we know with certainty when Romani started losing terrain, though the poor linguistic capacity in Romani among most Travellers suggests that the decline has been under way for a rather long time. When asked, the Norwegian Travellers tend to refer to *others* as being fluent speakers of Romani, nevertheless having a hard time actually identifying such speakers. Matras *et al.* (2008: 4) rightly note that the claims of linguistic capacity among Para-Romani speakers usually are *indexical*. This points to the fact that those who are referred to as fluent speakers, usually turn out not to be, and refer in turn to others as being the ones with the true linguistic competence, making indexical claims. The idea seems to be cultivated that there *has* existed a Norwegian inflected Romani variety, but this variety is not identifiable at any concrete point in time.

Interestingly, however, Matras *et al.* (2008) note that for English Travellers, encounters with Romani-speaking immigrants from eastern and central Europe (who have Romani as their mother tongue) actually strengthen the idea of a “stable, consistent or self-contained Romani language” (*ibid.*: 9). For many of my Norwegian informants, this seems not to be the case. In fact, many Norwegian Travellers question any relation to Gypsies, linguistically, genetically and culturally. They often refer to the language of the Gypsies as Romanés, and their own language as Romani, and prefer to deny any association between the two.

1.2.1 The Norwegian spoken by Travellers

Theil (p.c.) notes that the Norwegian spoken by Travellers may

preserve archaic morphological features. Bakker (1995: 129) notes that this also is the case for Spanish spoken by Roma who have it as their mother tongue. Theil (p.c.) points out that for Norwegian, the nominal inflexion follows patterns that have disappeared elsewhere in the eastern Norwegian variety they speak. For instance, in masculine nouns, the plural is formed through the suffix *-er*, *-ene*, as in *biler*, *bilene* ('cars', 'the cars') in the relevant Norwegian variety. However, Travellers have been reported to use the archaic suffixes *-ar*, *-ane*. This may indicate that they have preserved certain traits of a more archaic Norwegian variety. In addition, my informants indeed claim that their Norwegian differs from that of non-Travellers, but do not point to any specific deviations from the standard. Information is lacking on this point, and further studies on the Norwegian spoken by Travellers are needed.

1.3 Para Romani: A functional profile

Matras (2002: 248) suggests that the function of maintaining the original vocabulary but abandoning the original grammar is that of "identity-flagging and secret communication". Matras (*ibid.*) also suggests that this function may explain why certain linguistic constructions were retained (e.g. pronouns, numerals, demonstratives and negators), notably because they were useful for secretive purposes. Other grammatical features, those responsible for processing and organizing the utterance, he argues, could thus be abandoned, as they did not serve this secretive function. But as noted in 1.1.3, why the productive word-formation pattern exists is puzzling, as it cannot be regarded as fulfilling any of the above-mentioned functions. In Matras *et al.* (2008) the argument is continued that the Para-Romani varieties are "utterance-level devices", which transpose "the speech act into an emotive mood" (*ibid.*: 2). It is argued that this mood is shared by community members only, this way somehow functioning in the same way as the secretive function posed above. The term is argued to be that of "bystander deixis" (Matras *et al.* 2008: 8), by which the speech is directed towards the explicit exclusion of bystanders. Such a functional profile is concordant with

many speakers' own view of their language; namely as being secret and excluding.

2. The pronominal system in Norwegian Para-Romani

2.1 Method

The data stem from two sources. The primary sources are interviews. The secondary sources used are the writings of Knut Kristiansen, a former researcher at the University of Oslo, whose impressive collection of information on the Travellers of Scandinavia has been of great importance. These data are unpublished notes.

2.1.1 Primary sources

The primary sources are interviews, which stem from the following five informants:³

Table 1

Informant Nr.	Age	Nationality	Sex
1	27	Swedish	M
2	41	Norwegian	F
3	46	Norwegian	M
4	67	Swedish	M
5	74	Norwegian	F

Due to the difficulties of actually finding informants (cf. 2.1.3),

- 3 Although two informants are Swedish, I chose to use the term *Norwegian Para-Romani*, for three reasons: the majority of the data stem from Norwegian, the secondary sources mainly stem from Norwegian, and there are generally small differences between Norwegian and Swedish Para-Romani varieties.

the informants were chosen solely on the grounds of being Para-Romani speakers, that is, they were not balanced for other criteria. The interviews were structured through the use of specific methodological tools.⁴ Though the number of informants is low, the data were cross-checked with secondary sources. In addition, the pronominal system in question is to my knowledge undisputed, so the number of informants is not crucial.

2.1.2 Secondary sources

The secondary sources stem from Kristiansen's collection. They were primarily used to verify the claims made in literature, and as a standard of comparison to the primary sources. They are not directly quoted in the article because there was no deviation between primary sources and secondary sources. As mentioned above, the fact that Norwegian and Swedish Para-Romani pronouns derive from possessives seems fairly undisputed, and the constituency between secondary and primary sources illustrates this.

2.1.3 Methodological challenges

Unfortunately, very little is known about the actual functional profile of Para-Romani in use in Norway (or elsewhere in the world, for that matter). This is because the recording of Para-Romani in spontaneous use is a methodological challenge; it would require that the researcher were allowed to follow its speakers in their natural surroundings over a longer period of time, obviously intruding in their private lives. Also, the mere nature of Para-Romani makes the recollection of data particularly difficult. As Matras notes, it is particularly used within an "emotive mood" (2008: 9), and thus will neither be used when being elicited, nor in the presence of outsiders, such as researchers. Note that it is common for Travellers to be sceptical about sharing their

4 The tools stem from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Consult <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/tools-at-lingboard/tools.php> for details.

knowledge of their own language with outsiders; many have a view of their language as being secret or private. Others, however, happily share their knowledge, and it is their effort that made the creation of this article possible.

2.2 The pronominal system: A description

This section sets out to give a description of the pronominal system in Norwegian Para-Romani. Before continuing, it should be emphasized that the insertion of Romani vocabulary (both grammatical and lexical) is not obligatory for speakers of Para-Romani. The Romani items function as potential substitutes for the majority language's counterparts. This section does not make claims about the actual frequency of the insertion of the pronouns, but concentrates on providing a description and discussing diachronic issues.

As mentioned above, the pronominal system is one of the very few parts of the grammatical lexicon to have been retained in Norwegian Para-Romani. Interestingly, similar developments have also taken place in other Para-Romani varieties. As a matter of fact, all Para-Romani varieties seem to employ pronouns that originate in different case inflected pronouns (cf. Matras 1997). Matras (2002: 247) notes that for the third person, nominatives, non-nominatives or demonstratives (the latter the case in Norwegian Para-Romani) are employed. The first and second persons usually derive from non-nominative sources. As for the non-nominative sources, there is variation as to which case is selected as the source. Angloromani employs locatives (*mandi* 'I', *tuti* 'you'). Spanish Para-Romani (Caló) selects dative or instrumental forms (*mange*, *mansa* 'I', *tuke*, *tusa* 'you'). It thus seems to be the case that all Para-Romani varieties select case inflected pronouns as the default pronouns, but it is not uniform *which* cases are selected. Norwegian and Swedish Para-Romani varieties do, as we have seen, select pronouns from masculine possessive sources. Bakker (1995: 137) notes that Swedish Romani also selects ablative sources as default pronouns. Whereas this may well be the case, my data do not include examples of it, and I therefore leave it for future investigation. Table 2 gives an overview of the system in Norwegian Para-Romani:

Table 2

PERSON	MARKER	SOURCE
1SG	Mero/miro	Possessive
2SG	Dero/diro	Possessive
3SG	Dova ⁵	Demonstrative
1PL	Vorsnos	Nor. possessive + <i>-nos</i>
2PL	Ersnos ⁶	?
3PL	?	–

The Norwegian system is typical. 1SG and 2SG stem from a non-nominative source, that is, possessive pronouns. 2SG is, according to Matras (2002: 247) the Romani genitive *tiro*, contaminated with the Norwegian *din* 'your'. 3SG stems from a demonstrative. 1PL is, according to Matras (2002: 247) a camouflaged version of the Norwegian possessive pronoun (*vår* 'our'), possibly compounded with *-nus* 'us' of Romance sources, inherited through other secret languages. 2PL, *ersnos*, appeared in the speech of only one of the informants, and will not be treated further here. Indeed, Matras (2002: 247) notes that the singular forms are most prominent, and that plural forms are less frequently retained.

Note that the Norwegian loan (*vår*) also stems from a possessive

5 Note that *dova* also has demonstrative function in Norwegian Para-Romani,

6 Bakker (1992) claims that *ersnos* is possessive, meaning 'your', but makes no further comments on the subject.

source, not the default pronouns, as one might expect. This is puzzling, and suggests that Norwegian Para-Romani systematically prefers the possessive as the source for its person markers. 3PL is missing from the paradigm, and has not been retained in any original form. The Norwegian default 3PL pronoun *de*, ‘them’, is used.

According to Matras et al. (2008: 30) the probability of pronoun retention in Para-Romani varieties makes up a hierarchy, ranging from the forms most likely to be retained, to those least likely. The hierarchy is as follows:

Table 3

MOST LIKELY TO BE RETAINED	1SG/2SG
	1PL/2PL
	3SG
LEAST LIKELY TO BE RETAINED	3PL

According to Matras et al. (*ibid.*: 30), the hierarchy illustrates that the retention “favours simplicity, egocentricity, deixis, and topicality.” The hierarchy fits fairly well with the Norwegian pronominal system that we observed in Table 2. 3PL and 2PL have not been retained. 1SG and 2SG have. However, 1PL is a camouflaged version of a Norwegian possessive, while 3SG has been retained. In Norwegian, 3SG thus seems to belong higher up than 1PL and 2PL in the hierarchy.

3. How can we account for these developments?

3.1 Theory

In this section I attempt to place the data from Norwegian Para-Romani in a diachronic-semantic frame, as well as referring to what is known on parallel developments cross-linguistically. In addition, I explore the possibility that the use of case-inflected pronouns as default person markers in Para-Romani may be connected to the use of non-canonical person markers in certain Indo-Aryan languages.

3.2 Parallel developments?

Parallel developments have been attested. In *Russenorsk*, an extinct Russian/Norwegian pidgin spoken in the Russian border area in north-eastern Norway, the female Russian possessives *moja* ('mine') and *tvoja* ('yours') were used as default 1SG and 2SG subject pronouns, as in Norwegian Para-Romani (Theil, p.c.).

Bordal (2006: 17) notes that in Reunion Creole, the default 1SG person marker is *mi*, which is unlikely to stem from a nominative source, but rather from the accusative. This may suggest that the employment of case inflected pronouns other than nominatives as default subjects is likely to occur in mixed varieties, such as creoles and pidgins. The question which arises is obviously 'why?' and I now turn to theoretical approaches, though they do not fully account for the developments in question.

3.3 So, where do person markers come from?

The development from possessive to pronoun is not, to my knowledge, well attested in the languages of the world. The opposite development, of pronouns being the sources of possessives, is common, and has interestingly taken place in Norwegian Para-Romani. The pronoun *mero* (itself originating in a possessive) has served as the source for the Para-Romani possessive pronoun, which follows the default pattern of possession in Norwegian with the suffix *-s*; thus *meros*, *deros* (as Norwegian *hans*, *hennes*; 'his', 'her').

There is nevertheless a large literature on the lexical sources of grammatical markers. It is widely argued that these sources are not random, but follow predictable patterns (cf. for example Traugott & Dasher 2002). Usually, grammatical markers evolve from lexical items through a process of grammaticalization, by which the lexical items take on a more grammatical meaning. However, in the present case of person markers deriving from case inflected pronouns, we are not dealing with lexical items becoming grammatical ones, but rather with grammatical items changing grammatical function. Little is known about the semantic-pragmatic process by which these specific changes take place. One exception is the development from

demonstrative to person marker, which is well documented cross-linguistically, and which has also taken place in the 3SG in Norwegian Para-Romani. I return to the development of the demonstrative below.

One of the few thorough discussions on the sources of person markers is to be found in Siewierska (2004). Whereas she notes that very little is known about the lexical sources the markers may derive from, more is known about grammatical sources, such as demonstratives; “a major grammatical source of independent person markers” (*ibid.*: 247). Siewierska argues that the second most widespread source of person markers is other person markers, which may exist in various morphologically and phonologically dependent ways. Also, dependent markers may be the source of new independent forms. New dependent markers may also evolve from other dependent markers through extension or grammaticalization and fusion of grammaticalized periphrastic constructions, especially those featuring conjugated verb forms. I now turn to the development from demonstrative to person marker.

3.3.1 Demonstratives as sources

As noted above, demonstratives are a widespread source for person markers. It should be emphasized that they are primarily the source of third person markers, and not first and second person sources. This is precisely what we see in Norwegian Para-Romani, where the demonstrative *dova* has taken on a function as default 3SG person marker. It is typical that the sources of the first and the second person differ from that of the third, as is the case for Norwegian Para-Romani. Siewierska (2004: 249) notes that the employment of demonstratives as 3SG markers is widely attested cross-linguistically. In some languages, (e.g. Basque, Comanche, Kawaiisu) any demonstrative can be used as a third person marker.

Demonstratives and person markers have functional similarities. This fact makes it easier to explain the frequent development from demonstrative to default pronouns, than to describe the selection of different cases as default pronouns (as is the case for first and second persons in Para-Romani varieties). Demonstratives have an anaphoric

potential, and according to Siewierska (2002: 251), “all that is required for them to develop into third-person markers is that they should lose their deictic force”. Thus, given this anaphoric potential, it is not surprising that they often develop into 3SG pronouns. However, this does not facilitate the explanation of similar developments of other cases, as they arguably do not share the demonstrative’s functional similarities. Since little is known about the development of person markers, this is a potentially rewarding field of study.

3.4 Remains of an archaic system?

Zoller (cf. article on pp. 121–151 in this volume) suggests that there may be a connection between the use of non-canonical marking (e.g. non-nominative marking) of subjects in certain Indo-Aryan languages and the generalization of case marked pronouns to default person markers in Para-Romani.

In various Indo-Aryan languages, person markers in subject function are case-inflected according to different semantic criteria. Cases found in these languages to mark the subject are ergative, instrumental, dative, genitive and locative (Zoller, p.c.).

Thus, one could hypothesize that Romani, before developing into Para-Romani, had a similar system. As the inflected varieties disappeared and evolved into Para-Romani varieties, the different varieties preserved different case inflected pronouns as their default person markers. Subsequently, it could be assumed that the case-inflected pronouns that we observe today as default pronouns (e.g. the possessive in Norwegian Para-Romani) were generalized because they already existed in the subject function in Romani.

However difficult to completely disregard, such a hypothesis has various shortcomings. It fails to account for the fact that the ablative has been generalized in Swedish Para-Romani, as observed by Bakker (1995: 137), since pronouns in ablative case never occur in subject position in Indo-Aryan languages (Zoller, p.c.). If the use of case-inflected pronouns as default subjects in Para-Romani today were in fact the remnants of an archaic system, why would the ablative occur as default pronoun? In addition, it sheds no further light on the question of why the specific cases are selected in different varieties.

That is, if case inflected pronouns were in fact used in subject position in inflected Romani, why has their retention not been uniform? Why has Norwegian Para-Romani preserved the possessive, while Anglo-Romani employs the locative? Most importantly, too little is known about the nature of the pronominal system in the relevant Romani varieties prior to their becoming Para-Romani varieties. Further studies on the subject may be rewarding.

4. Conclusions

The present paper has discussed the pronominal system in Para-Romani varieties, with a special emphasis on Norwegian. We have observed that 1SG and 2SG person forms tend to stem from non-uniform and non-predictable case inflected pronouns. Plural forms tend not to be retained. 3SG usually originates in demonstrative pronouns. Semantically, the development from demonstrative to person marker is relatively straightforward; demonstratives have an anaphoric nature, which makes them particularly eligible for becoming person markers as they lose their deictic force. Still, the processes by which other case-marked pronouns, such as possessives, locatives, accusatives or ablatives, become default person-markers of 1SG/PL and 2SG/PL is unclear. In fact, the semantic process by which this takes place is poorly treated in the literature. The same goes for the selection between the cases. No matter which explanation we choose to lean on: retention of archaic structures or the result of a common process in mixed languages, a crucial question remains unanswered: are all cases equally eligible? Why are possessives consistently selected as sources of person markers in Norwegian Para-Romani? What is the nature of the semantic/ pragmatic process by which this takes place? Is the 'random' selection of case inflected pronouns person markers typical for languages that emerge in extreme contact situations, such as the ones mentioned? If so, why? More questions are posited than answered, which illustrates that further studies on grammatical retention in Para-Romani are needed.

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