

Yaron Matras. *Romani n Britain: The Afterlife of a Language*, 2010, xv + 255 pages. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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The Journal of Language Contact, Vol. 4, 2011. 295-310.

In a world where language endangerment, death, and revitalization have become topics of considerable urgency among field linguists as well as for many others concerned with the study of human communication and also to those who use rather than study the languages in question, the concept of a linguistic afterlife put forth in the subtitle of Matras' work on Angloromani is a thought-provoking and nuanced idea. The work itself, which is the first corpus-based, book-length treatment of Angloromani since Smart and Crofton (1875), is of interest not only to those concerned with Romani linguistics, language contact, and language shift, but also to anyone interested in the nature of language itself as well as its relation to identity. Matras has done here for Angloromani what he did for Romani in his *Romani: A Linguistic Introduction* (Matras 2002), which is the best book of its kind. Given the nature of Angloromani vis-à-vis Romani (also called *inflected Romani* or *European Romani* in the context of Angloromani), however, the topics of analysis are somewhat different. Romani, as Matras notes, is an "everyday family and community language, much like Bulgarian, Catalan or Welsh" complete with inflectional grammar, phonology, and core vocabulary of Middle Indic origin and "not limited to a special lexicon," as some misguided anthropologists (e.g., Okely 1983) and social historians (e.g. Willems 1997) and even a linguist (Wexler 1997) have claimed (23,13-14). By contrast, Angloromani is distinguished primarily by its lexicon, although Matras (26) argues that it is "more than just a plain English-based matrix for the insertion of Romani-derived lexical items." This last is the key issue in what Matras (ibid.) calls "the 'language' status of Angloromani," and it is a point to which we shall return below. It is also worth noting here that in his preface, Matras (xiv) states: "I sincerely hope that the findings presented in this study will equally be of interest and benefit to our consultants and their families and community." This, too, is a topic to which we shall return below, but it can be stated at the outset that this work does indeed fulfill the goals of being of interest and use to both linguists and speakers.

The work comprises a preface (xii-xv), six chapters (1-175), two appendices (176-231), bibliography (232-341; about 225 items), author index (242-243) and subject index (246-255). The preface gives an overview of the work and sets it in the context of the discussion of mixed languages in general, and other Romani-based lexicons of Romani-Gypsy minorities in particular. The first chapter (1-30), entitled "*Angloromani: A Different kind of Language?*", addresses general issues of the status of Angloromani as a language. It opens with a presentation of the community whose speech forms constitute the object of study. These communities refer to themselves as (English or Welsh) Gypsies, and to the "special vocabulary" (1) that they use in interactions among themselves as *Romanes*. Some also use the adjective *Romany* to refer to various aspects of their life, and some use *Romanichal* for their community. Romani-speakers came to Britain in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and the Angloromani lexicon derives overwhelmingly from that language. Matras discusses in detail theories of the origin of Angloromani as a pidgin, creole, mixed language, or secret language. He

observes that there is no evidence that a pidginized or creolized version of Romani was ever used either between Romani-speaking and non-Romani-speaking peripatetic groups (the latter known as Travellers in Great Britain and Ireland) or between Romani-speakers and non-peripatetic clients. In fact, the evidence from Smart & Crofton (1875) indicates that British Romani and Angloromani coexisted within the British Gypsy community during the last stages of shift from one to the other, the difference being essentially generational.

Matras also argues against the appellation of *secret language*, given the fact that while hiding understanding from outsiders is one of the functions of Angloromani, it is by no means the only such function. In fact, this work makes it abundantly clear that Angloromani functions as a family and community linguistic marker of identity. Matras also argues against classifying Angloromani as a mixed language in the sense of Michif, Ma'a, Copper Island Aleut, Media Lengua, Gurindji Kriol, etc. Based on a thorough survey of the available literature, he observes: "...none of the recorded cases of mixed languages shows any kind of mixture of sources for finite verb inflection, whereas the bulk or at least a significant portion of the basic lexicon...and possibly other domains of grammar are borrowed from another [language]." From this basically structural account, Angloromani could be counted as a mixed language, but Matras also notes that mixed languages involve conventionalized rather than ad hoc mixtures, whereas in Angloromani, the insertions of Romani origin are neither predictable nor conventionalized (19-20). To illustrate this he directs the reader to the first examples in the text (pp. 6-7) and goes on to cite a number of Angloromani examples demonstrating that the class of pronouns, which is a closed and tightly defined domain, are subject to variation rather than conventionalization, e.g. *Del it to him* 'Give it to him'; *I've chinggered lesti* 'I've annoyed him'; *Mandi doesn't kom lesti* 'I don't like him', etc. (20). Matras also brings in some examples which he claims demonstrate that Angloromani is "more than just a plain English-based matrix for the insertion of Romani-derived lexical elements." (25-26). This argument is treated by him in greater detail in Chapter 4, so we shall return to it below.

Matras concludes the first chapter with his own account of the origins of Angloromani in its current form. He suggests two principal factors: pressure to assimilate and intermarriage with English-speaking Travellers. It is this second factor, however, that he elaborates. He assumes that when an English-speaking Traveller married into a Romani-speaking nuclear family, the family accommodated the Anglophone by using English and the Anglophone did not learn Romani, and then the extended household of several nuclear families also accommodated the monoglot speaker. As intermarriage increased, English became the dominant household language. He suggests that the process began in the south, where contacts between the two groups were more intense, and gradually moved north (and, presumably, west into Wales, cf. Sampson 1926), where it was not completed until the late nineteenth century. Ultimately, English became the language of predication, and Romani vocabulary became "the linguistic referential resource that was needed in order to flag group membership..., and to disguise key propositional content from outsiders." As such, it has become what he calls "an emotive conversational mode" (30).

The scenario is certainly plausible, and there are plenty of examples where a dominant state language infiltrates the home language of minority speakers of other

languages via marriage to speakers of the state language who are connected to the linguistic minority through other factors, e.g. religion, as in Vrbnik (Albanian Vërnik), the only Macedonian-speaking Christian village left in its region on the Albanian side of the Greek-Albanian border. While Macedonian-speaking Muslims are not considered acceptable marriage partners, Albanian-speaking Orthodox Christians are, and since all the Macedonian-speaking villagers are now bilingual with Albanian, Macedonian-speaking families will accommodate a monoglot Albanian-speaking bride. Whether this will lead to massive shift remains to be seen. Given the institutional support for Macedonian in other parts of Albania as well as in the Republic of Macedonia, the scenario could turn out differently.

The issue of institutional support is a significant one in discussing Angloromani, insofar as there has been no such support for Romani until the late twentieth century (with the exception of a brief interlude in the USSR shortly after the October Revolution). Matras identifies weak institutional support as distinguishing Romani from other European languages such as Welsh and Catalan when he is discussing the fact that Romani is a language earlier in Chapter 1, but he does not invoke that factor at the end of the chapter. He does discuss such issues toward the end of the book, and so we shall return to them later.

Chapter 2 (31-56), “*The Roots of Romani*”, is a basic overview of the linguistic history of Romani necessary for contextualizing the main topic of the book. It is a fine summary of the author’s current views on Romani history and dialectology and can stand on its own as a brief introduction to the subject. Based on the fact that features spread across various territories via contact among groups of Romani speakers, a crucial conclusion of Matras’ is that the labels for Romani dialect groups do not indicate immutably bounded entities but rather convenient heuristic constructs that provide an economical shorthand for discussing the distribution of structural features. In this he is firmly committed to *Wellentheorie* and opposed to a literal reading of the *Stammbaum* approach to Romani dialectology. This chapter also contains two useful maps (54, 56).

Chapter 3 (57-94), “*The Historical Position of British Romani*”, looks at the Northern dialect group of Romani to which British Romani belongs with a special focus on the English and Welsh Romani that make up British Romani, the predecessor of Angloromani. This chapter is important in that it revises the presentation in Matras (2002)—thanks to new research by both the author and others—so that the Northern dialect group and its western and eastern sub-groups emerge as a chain of related systems rather than, as was previously thought, a group of more or less autonomous dialects for which the term ‘Northern’ was more geographic than descriptive of historical relations. This chapter thus represents an important advance for both Romani dialectology and the Romani history implied by that dialectology. At the end of this chapter Matras again returns to the origin of modern Angloromani, and notes that in the nineteenth century Romani passed the point of “*functional turnover*, where communication becomes secondary to emblematic display, and where native acquisition of the family language gives way to *selective replication* of content-salient structures.” (94).

Chapter 4 (95-129), “*The Structural Composition of Angloromani*”, treats phonology, word formation and derivation (the longest section), grammatical vocabulary (adverbs, deictics, pronouns, negation), remnants or grammatical inflection (frozen forms and archaisms), morphosyntactic characteristics, and lexical composition and

distribution (including frequency and degree of speaker knowledge). This chapter thus represents the linguistic analysis of the corpus. As with the rest of the work, the analysis is clear, careful, concise, and valuable. The section on morpho-syntax treats in detail the issue alluded to above of whether or not Angloromani can be described entirely in terms of its lexicon, which, potentially, bears on the what Matras calls the “*linguageness*” of Angloromani.

In the morpho-syntax section (119-122), Matras goes into some detail on those features of Anglo-Romani that are not structurally compatible with the everyday dialect of English spoken by the consultants. These features are all omissions and levelings of English features, and none represent patterns found in inflected Romani. The first of these features constitutes a class that Matras calls “expressive utterances” and are all omissions: omission of the copula, omission of the definite article, zero anaphora, and other omissions, e.g. *mush akai* ‘[a] man [is] there’; *mandi boktalo, del mandi obben* ‘I [am] hungry, give me food’; *kek jel there, lel the otchaben!* ‘Don’t go there, [you’ll] get VD’ (120). Compare also *Mush kek juns chichi* ‘[The] man knows nothing’ (25), where the omission is the definite article. As with lexical insertions, these omissions are not conventionalized. Matras formulates this structural difference between Angloromani and English thus: “AR allows greater flexibility in the omission of overt reference, indicating that information is contextually highly retrievable.” (120). The two other features cited by Matras are the leveling or present tense marking, e.g. *mandi jins* ‘I know’, *tutti jins* ‘you know’, etc., (121; we can note these levelings are attested in other dialects of English, at least in North America) and leveling in tense-aspect and negation, e.g. *Foki jel akai* ‘People [are] com[ing] here’ (122; cf. *Lesti’s savving at mandi* ‘He is laughing at me’ p. 20). These kinds of levelings are all omissions except for the generalization of the 3rd person marker and the use of *kek* and its variants to mean both ‘not’ and negated ‘do’ as an auxiliary or placeholder.

While such omissions and levelings may indeed not occur the consultants’ everyday English, however, characterizing them as “not quite fully grammatical sentences in any variety of English” (26) is itself not quite accurate. In fact, the “hot news” register of English, which is the primary register of newspaper headlines, has precisely the same types of frequent but not conventionalized omissions and levelings (except the present-tense marker leveling, which is, however, dialectal elsewhere, and negator leveling, which could be explained as polysemy rather than morpho-syntax). Consider the following: MAN BITES DOG, PRESIDENT TO MEET WITH WORLD LEADERS, BEATLES HERE TODAY, ELVIS NOT DEAD, HUGE KID PORN FIND ROCKS GOLD COAST (*Chicago Sun times*, 21 June 2003), etc. Most of the Angloromani examples with the relevant omissions are warnings; consider in this regard also instructional signs, e.g. DANGER. BRIDGE OUT. At issue is the concept of “grammatical English” as opposed to the deployment of contextually marked rules of affective English. In a sense these omissions in Angloromani represent structures of English grammar that are limited to certain contexts but are being deployed in contexts where they otherwise do not occur. However, even this characterization should be modified insofar as there are dialects of English spoken in North America where at least some of the omissions typical of Angloromani can occur in spoken discourse.

In positing these omissions and levelings as unique to Angloromani, Matras is arguing with Muysken’s (1981) hypothesis that Angloromani is limited to relexification,

i.e. the “insertion of lexical tokens into predefined slots within the English sentence.” (119). Matras characterizes this hypothesis as suggesting that “Romani-derived words are not types in their own right, but merely substitute tokens for English lexical types.” (ibid.) and goes on further to say that this approach assumes that “AR is entirely ‘parasitic’ on the pre-structured English utterance” (ibid.). He argues that this assumption must be dismissed based on the morpho-syntactic differences cited above.

This debate relates to the languageness of Romani. By using the adverb ‘merely’ and the adjective ‘parasitic’ in the citations above, Matras moves beyond the purely structural and into the ideological, which, however, is relevant to the question of languageness. On purely structural grounds, why should a lexicon be “mere”? Similarly, parasitism is a relationship in which one living organism damages another by both living and feeding on or in it. If one wanted to describe the relationship of Angloromani to (other) forms of English in such biological terms, why not call the relationship symbiotic? Angloromani benefits from the grammatical structure of English and English benefits from the enrichment of its lexicon and modes of variation from Angloromani. Of course, such a description assumes that lexical items and structural variants constitute a kind of wealth. One is reminded here of numerous proverbs in all the languages of the Balkans (except Greek) to the effect of the Macedonian version: *Jazice se bogatstvo* ‘languages are wealth.’ But my point here is not to attempt to provide an “objective” metric of whether Angloromani is a “language” a “dialect of English” a “register of English” or even “a kind of Romani”. Here Le Page & Tabouret-Keller’s (1985) *Acts of Identity* is relevant. When a person utilizes Angloromani in speech, s/he is performing an act of identity as part of the act of communication.

To the question: But is this act a language or a dialect? we can respond with the question: Why? *Cui bono?*—who benefits from “deciding” how to “classify” Angloromani? There are governments and NGOs that have concrete interests in a given speech form being a separate language or a “mere” dialect, and here my use of the belittling *mere* is meant to echo the attitude of an ideology that can have damaging effects in both politics and social relations. Greece has driven most of its minority languages to the brink of extinction—or beyond—in part by convincing their speakers that their home languages were not “languages” but illiterate “idioms”, and to this day Bulgarian dialectologists insist that Macedonian is a dialect of Bulgarian (see Kočev 2001). If Angloromani is a dialect of English, that gives it less status and potential support than if it is a language, and these factors in turn can affect the attitudes of speakers, cf. the older autonym *poggadi chib* literally ‘broken tongue/language’, once used by speakers themselves for Angloromani. So-called scientific approaches to languageness are problematic at best and abusive at worst, given the fact that language does not exist outside a socio-political context. One has only to read about the Ebonics debate in the 1990s in the United States and the media flap in 2010 when the U. S. Department of Justice listed Ebonics along with Arabic, Pashto, and various other languages for which it was hiring experts, to see how the languageness question is not simply about linguistics.

Matras returns to the question of languageness at the beginning of Chapter 5, “*The Conversational Functions of Angloromani*”. Here again, Matras, citing Bakker (1998), makes the point that Angloromani, like other Para-Romani languages, has functions beyond those of a secret language and has its origins as a household language. Matras

also notes that unlike codeswitching in bilingual situations, there is no unmarked choice normally favored in group-internal interactions. Matras then proposes to define the conversational function of Angloromani as not limited to the social effect of flagging identity (including boundaries separating the group from outsiders) but rather as “activat[ing] an exclusive, group-specific presuppositional domain as the background against which an utterance is to be processed.” (133). At the same time, Matras notes that Angloromani is not used in sustained conversation or narration, i.e. for “all-purpose communication.” (148). Anglo-Romani is thus a conversation, discourse, or speech-act device rather than a consistent code preferred for the entire course of a conversation.

Matras also proposes the interesting comparison between Angloromani and grammaticalization as defined by Hopper (1991) and Hopper and Traugott (2003). The analogy seems to be that if grammaticalization is a process whereby words are bleached of their semantic content in the service of grammar and come to modify other structures, then Angloromani has been bleached of its propositional content and modifies the discourse as a whole. From the point of view of scholars such as Joseph (2001), however, who view grammaticalization as an epiphenomenon, a result of other well-known linguistic processes—phonological reduction, analogy, semantic bleaching, etc.—rather than as a process in itself, it could be argued that Matras’ *afterlife of a language* is the discourse modification represented by Angloromani, which is the result of well-known processes of language shift. This is not the same as language death, it could be argued, just as, for example, the processes of phonological reduction and lexical bleaching that result in the grammaticalization of an independent lexical item into an aspect-marking affix, e.g. the Turkish progressive marker *-yor* from the older 3 sg general present *yorur* ‘goes, walks’, is not “word death”. True, the affix is no longer an independent word, but it serves a vital function in the language. Similarly, Angloromani serves a vital function in the community that speaks it.

The last section of Chapter 5 (146-156) is devoted to the perspectives of speakers themselves and questions of revitalization. Here it is clear that Angloromani speakers are aware that their community has “lost” Romani, i.e. that in previous generations, members of their community used a dialect of the language that is used as an everyday household and community language in various parts of Europe (and beyond), as well as by more recent Romani immigrants to the British Isles from eastern and central Europe. Matras discusses in detail the roles played by evangelical Christianity and contacts with Romani speakers from eastern and central Europe (the two are overlapping but not co-terminous categories) in encouraging Angloromani speakers to learn inflected Romani. There are a variety of motivations, both pragmatic (mobility in the missionary hierarchy, communication with other Gypsy groups) and ideological (the desire to regain a lost heritage). As such, as with codification (see especially Matras 1999), so too with revitalization, the movement is characterized as bottom-up rather than top-down, which in turn is consistent with Romani/Gypsy attitudes toward outsider insitutional structures.

Chapter 6, “*Conclusions: The Decline, Death, and Afterlife of a Language*” (167-175), summarizes the analyses and arguments in the foregoing chapters.

The appendices are important resources and greatly add to the value of this fine book. Appendix 1 (176-217) is an English-Angloromani lexicon based entirely on the spoken corpus (both conversation and elicitation, collected 2004-2006) and contains approximately 1600 main entries. This is approximately the number in Smart and

Crofton's (1872:164-190) English-Angloromani lexicon. Each entry is identified for part of speech and what Matras calls the "predecessor expression"—in the overwhelming majority of cases, European Romani—and variants are grouped with a single entry. Thus, for example, the English word 'good' has four entries: three are adjectives—*kushti* + 9 variants, from *kuč* 'dear', *latcho* (+ *latcha*, *latchi*) from *lačho* 'good', and *mishto* from *mišto* 'good, well'—and one is a noun, *kosko*, which is also from *kuč*. The appendix also refers to an online extended version of the lexicon at <<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/angloromani>> (accessed 1 July 2011), which includes material from 17 published sources that appeared between 1875 and 2002, sound files, and also has links to the Romani Morpho-Syntactic Database (University of Manchester), the ROMLEX Romani lexical database (University of Graz), a Caló dictionary, and other Romani resources at the University of Manchester, Matras' home institution, and beyond.

The second appendix (218-231) gives "predecessor expressions" by origin, about 500 Romani items, 18 items from French, German, and Yiddish (some of which occur in European Romani dialects in Western Europe), 18 items from Shelta and Cant (the non-Romani lexicons of Travellers of the British Isles), and 24 English items, whose shape is altered in Angloromani, e.g. *boshtadi* 'bastard'.

The book is clearly written and generally free of typographical and editorial errors or errors of fact with one utterly minor exception, which, however, must be noted. On p. 22 Matras is discussing secret languages whose basis is phonological distortion, and he writes: "Adding individual syllables or sounds to syllables or words is a popular playful creation strategy that is universally common among teenagers (often called *Pig Latin*)." However, at least in the United States, Pig Latin, or Igpay Atinlay, is a specific secret language of this type and not a general term. It is quite distinct from, e.g. Abinglabish, Enopgoplopishop (Inglopishop in some dialects), King Tut, etc. Also, while such languages are indeed used by teenagers in many countries, precisely Pig Latin and other such languages in the U.S. are used mainly by elementary school children (see Zim 1978).

In sum, then, this is an excellent book. It is a careful, sensitive, and thorough survey and analysis of modern Angloromani as it is used in Britain today and can thus be read with profit by many different audiences. Those interested in Romani, in language contact, and in language shift will all gain useful knowledge from this study. At the same time, the book will be of use and interest to speakers of Angloromani themselves.

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