

Review PhD dissertation

Peter Wagner

A Grammar of North West Lovari Romani

Peter Wagner's PhD dissertation is another high quality work on a single Romani variety which stands in a long line of "expanded single speaker dialect descriptions". This tradition started with John Sampson with his still highly and outstanding work *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales: being the older form of British Romani preserved in the speech of the clan of Abram Wood* published in 1926. By concentrating on one "key referent" for his thesis - "Anna Lankatosová, a lady about 70 years old" - the author not only followed the "expanded single speaker" setup but also the "older form" approach. This approach usually results in highly valuable studies for the understanding of Romani in all its aspects which is particularly true for the case at issue. However, whereas Sampson concentrated on diachronic linguistics and mainly on etymology, Peter Wagner has chosen a quasi synchronic descriptive approach and sidelined etymology due to "lack of profound knowledge" which is no problem at all. On the contrary the synchronic descriptive approach chosen is more up to date and also highly adequate in the context of modern Romani linguistics in the 21st century.

Aside of all the other spoken and written texts taken into account of this thorough and highly elaborated analysis, which is fully in line with the basic principles of the "expanded single speaker dialect description", the author also considered the main and most important works which contributed to the development of Romani linguistics during the last decades in general and with respect to the description of Lovari Romani in particular. Without going into the controversies, e.g. the one about the reasons for the development of dialectal plurality of Romani during the late pre-European phase, the author managed to make use of these descriptions and studies in the best way possible. One might be tempted to criticise that the short dialectological survey is primarily based on Boretzky's studies and seems to neglect the extended dialectological analysis of Matras and the Manchester Romani Project. However, with respect to the intra-dialectal plurality of Northern Vlax Romani in general and Lovari Romani in particular the work of Matras et al. which is reflected first of all by the Manchester Romani Morphosyntax Database offers no sufficient data to be considered. On the other hand, controversies on the historical development of dialectal plurality of Romani are only peripheral to the main subject, the "Synchronous Description of North West Lovari Romani".

This holds also true for the sociolinguistic aspect which is basically also outside the scope of the study; it is only dealt with in the last sub chapter of the introduction which is not noted as a shortcoming at all in this context. However, especially with respect to language use some more information could maybe have been added here; especially to accommodate the interest and curiosity of this part of the scientific community that is especially interested in the functional aspects of Romani language use. As applied Romani linguistics is more and more dealing with the currently ongoing process of functional expansion of Romani into formal, mostly written domains some notes on the question if

North West Lovari Romani is also undergoing such a development would have been an extra. In the case that there is such a development in North West Lovari Romani a short overview of expansion strategies as loans, calquing, copying, semantic expansion of existing lexemes etc. would have been of high interest too. But as previously mentioned, this is no shortcoming at all. The same holds true for structural differences between varieties of different age groups and for differences in varieties of groups in different contact situations. For example, answers to questions like *Does the presence or absence of direct contact with a Hungarian speaking majority population effect lexicon and linguistic structure? Are there any differences between the linguistic varieties of generations or subgroups if Hungarian is replaced by Czech or Slovak as primary contact language and competence in Hungarian differs between the age groups?* would have been very welcome. These questions relate to the field of contact induced language change caused by social changes; a highly interesting aspect of minority linguistics in general. However, it has to be stressed once more, that the fact that the author did not deal with these topics in his thesis, is no short coming at all.

The main part of the thesis, the descriptive part covering the structural levels in three main chapters dealing with Phonology, Morphology and Syntax, is very well and logically structured, highly elaborated, detailed and extremely well illustrated with examples. It is of overall high quality with respect to the descriptive tradition of language documentation. The handling of phonetics and phonology leaves no open question. Table 7 "Phoneme Sound Mapping" which summarises the correlations between phonemes and their respective phonetic realisations is, at least to my knowledge, an innovation in writing Romani grammars. Compared to other grammatical descriptions of Romani varieties the morphological part of this thesis is highly elaborated too. The descriptions of nominal and verbal morphology are structured according to the form function dichotomy using the traditional patterns of grammatical description. On the background of the current developments in Romani linguistics this traditional approach is maybe the only shortcoming of the thesis, although, it does not really affect the informative aspect of the description. However, to deal with verbal inflection and the TMA system on the background of the basic blueprint of the TMA system of Romani as shown in Matras (2002) would have linked the description more closely to the general patterns of Romani. The same holds true for the descriptions of deictics respectively demonstrative pronouns and for the nominal category of animacy. The latter could have been dealt within the wider and more adequate framework of discourse prominence. But these are just marginal issues which in no way diminish the overall quality of the thesis. Exceptionally elaborated and detailed is the description of the syntax. As many grammatical descriptions of Romani varieties deal with syntax only marginally or even not at all, this has to be stressed here as one of the very positive aspects of this excellent work; and it is not only the quantity it is first of all the quality of dealing with syntactical aspects which deserves highest merits.

Overall, Peter Wagner's PhD dissertation on *North West Lovari Romani* is an excellent descriptive work showing high analytical skills in language documentation.

