Chapter 1

Scandoromani: Language and Speakers

1.1. Background

1.1.1. The Various Groups of Travellers and Roma in Scandinavia

Like anywhere else in Europe, the Nordic countries have a number of groups known as Travellers or Roma. The identification of these groups—their language, their ethnicity, and their origin—is a complex and problematic issue. It is also a highly sensitive one, governed by changes in the political climate.

Both Sweden and Norway have signed the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (Council of Europe): Sweden in 2000 and Norway in 1998 in which Romani has been included. As implemented by these countries, the charter differs somewhat concerning the various dialects of Romani. The Norwegian treaty (*Minoritetsspråkspakten*) distinguishes *Romani* (the language of the Romany people: the so-called Travellers) from *Romanes* (the language of the Roma minority: the Gypsies).1 The Swedish treaty (*Minoritetsspråkskonventionen*) makes no such distinction but speaks only of *Romani chib*.2 That said, it does distinguish five dialects: Kelderash, Lovari, Arli, Kale, and Swedish (“Travellers”) Romani. Meanwhile, the Danish treaty implementing the charter does not recognize Romani as a national minority language, even while acknowledging that Romani was spoken historically in Denmark. The Finnish treaty does recognize Romani and targets the Kale Romani minority in particular.3 The situation in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland reflects half a millennium of Romani immigration into Scandinavia, originating from various countries in at least three waves.

Linguistic evidence (see e.g., Matras 2010, 31ff.) reveals much about the origin and spread of Romani and the migration of the Romani people, all the way back to their presumed homeland in central India in the mid-First Century AD. The story leading up to their first appearance in the Nordic countries at the beginning of the 16th Century (one cannot exclude completely the possibility of earlier migrations) is both interesting and complex. The reconstruction

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1 See http://www.sprakrad.no for further information from the Norwegian government and the EU.
2 See Bijvoet and Fraurud (2007) and http://www.sprakradet.se for further information from the Swedish government, the Swedish Language Council, and the EU.
3 For further details, see http://www.coe.int and look under the various countries.
of inward migrations in the 16th through 19th centuries is problematic, not least because of the almost complete absence of linguistic sources (see Section 1.2.2). Further migrations from Europe have continued, particularly during the 20th Century.

The dialect Scandoromani, described in this volume, is a remnant of the language spoken by the first Romani immigrants to the Nordic countries. It belongs to the northwest continuum of Romani dialects (see Matras 2002, 10ff., 2010, 45ff., cf. also 1.3.2): a group that also embraces the Sinte/Manouche dialects spoken in Germany, France, Netherlands, Hungary, Bohemia, Slovakia, Russia, and northern Italy, and the Finnish Kale dialect. All share a period of intense contacts with German dialects (Matras 2002, 10; see Section 1.4).

Scandoromani—often mistakenly referred to as a “special vocabulary” (Matras 2002, 10)—is a mixed language. It almost completely lacks the prototypically Indo-Aryan inflectional system found in other Romani dialects, including Sinte or Kale. It is very different—not just in vocabulary, but also in inflection, grammar, and syntax—from later in-migrating dialects of Romani such as Kelderaš, Lovari, and Čurari (1860s–1920s); Polska Roma, Lovari and Kelderaš (1950s–70s); and Arli (1990s–2000s).4 The level of mutual intelligibility between speakers of Scandoromani and other dialects in the Nordic countries is generally very low. Unsurprisingly, loanwords into Scandoromani from other, later in-migrating dialects are almost completely absent, indicating that contact between Scandoromani speakers of the first migration and speakers of Kelderaš, Lovari, Romungro, Polska Romani, etc., of the second and later migrations has been relatively limited.

1.1.2. The Scandoroma: Language, Culture, and Identity
Several studies have been devoted to the culture, language, and disposition of Scandoroma in Sweden and Norway. Most discuss problems of cultural/ethnic identity: a key notion in the wider debate on Scandoroma. Historically, this has been the big issue in Sweden and Norway: the identity of Resande (Reisende) and Tattare (Tatere), whether or not they are to be regarded as ethnic minorities. This is parallel to the situation in Great Britain, where one finds both Travellers of non-Romani origin (i.e., Scottish and Irish Travellers) and Romani Travellers (Romnichel) (see Matras 2010, 2f.). In the early literature such as Sundt (1852), Etzler (1944), and Iversen (1944), the population of Tattare (Tatere) is regarded as descended from the first Roma (Gypsies) to immigrate to the Nordic countries in the 16th Century, as reflected (among other things) in their language. Later literature such as Heymowski (1968, 1977) and Svensson (1993)

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4 For an overview of later immigrations, see Fraurud and Hyltenstam (1999, 272).