CHAPTER 4

Outline of a Syntax

Broadly speaking, Scandoromani syntax patterns follow Scandinavian patterns. One finds speech—fully comprehensible and grammatically correct Scandoromani—in which word order, constructions, syntactic patterns, etc., are fully equivalent to the matrix language: word by word and beyond, to the level of verbal and nominal compounding. See Example (4a) for a sentence in Scandoromani and corresponding sentence in Swedish, illustrating the basic principles of syntax in Scandoromani.

(4a)

Penn-a to dillo-n te lo av-ar andre
Säg till stackar-n att han gå-r in
say-IMP to wretch-DEF that he go-PRS in

(‘Tell the poor guy to come in.’)

The nature of the interview environment creates an unavoidable difficulty. When a native speaker of Scandoromani—who is, naturally, fluent in Swedish—is asked, in Swedish: ‘what is the corresponding construction in Scandoromani?’, the first construction he produces (LL, KTD) is normally completely corresponding to Swedish syntax. The same pattern occurs frequently—though not consistently!—in writing. On the other hand, when a speaker is asked¹ e.g., to refer to a situation or describe what is happening in pictures (see further 4.5), he will frequently deviate from Swedish syntax. Sections 4.1–4.3 will examine a few of these deviations. Section 4.4 will examine patterns of code-mixing.

4.1. Use of Unmarked Verbal Form

When transcribing or otherwise listening to Scandoromani recordings, one of the most striking features of the language is its use of the unmarked verbal form in -a on nearly all occasions. As we discussed earlier (Section 3.3), Scandoromani has primarily one inflection type for verbs, corresponding to the Scandinavian weak conjugation Type I (Holmes & Hincliffe 2003, 216f.). This is typically

¹ We base this on our experience mainly with LL.
produced in Scandoromani as infinitive -a, present tense -(a)r, preterit -(a)de, supine -(a)t, past participle -(a)d, present participle -ande. These forms, which are readily produced in interviews discussing verb inflection, are almost never used in everyday speech or writing.2 The supine and past participle forms are infrequent: main clause constructions with straight word order and constructions without auxiliaries and subordinate clauses are normally preferred. An unmarked form, ending in -a, is applied in nearly all circumstances. Context determines interpretation of the form as infinitive, present tense, or preterite. Throughout this volume, we have glossed the unmarked form as INF, referring to the formal marking; but we have normally translated it either as present tense or preterit (see e.g., Example 4b).

4.2. Subject Place-Holder Omission

The most important deviation from Swedish syntax lies in the possibility to omit the place-holder subject, obligatory in Swedish,3 a rule connected to the Swedish fixed word order (Hultman 2003, 299f.; Holmes & Hincliffe 2003, 436f.). Its primary application in Scandoromani is to 3rd person singular and plural, though it applies as well to the 1st singular form4 of the personal/demonstrative pronoun (Table 4.1) and to such impersonal constructions as Swedish det, Scandoromani doll. Along with verb place-holder deletion (Section 4.3), this phenomenon is likely connected to the anti-Zipfian effect described in Section 3.4.3.8. The combination of a two-syllable pronoun: e.g., mander (‘I’) or doll (‘it’); with a two-syllable copula or an auxiliary: e.g., honkar (‘is’) or kamm (‘has’); results in, with a sentence prosody pattern similar to Swedish, difficulties with the pronunciation in rapid speech. Consequently, the place-holder subject or the copula—but never the place-holder auxiliary—is deleted. The phenomenon happens more frequently with intransitive than transitive verbs. With zero-transitive verbs (see Example 4c), it is almost obligatory.

(4b) Frog story
Pre tejsa-n ja lo oppri
at morning-DEF go.INF he up

2 The monosyllabic verbs are normally an exception; see Section 3.3.
3 As well as the object.
4 Second-person usage seems to be rare.