

Verbal modifiers in North-Eastern Romani: corpus-driven approach

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Introduction

Northeastern Romani dialects include closely related dialects spoken in Poland, Belarus, Russia and the Baltic countries; see (Tenser 2008).

Map of Northeastern Romani dialects



- ▶ One of the structural features of these dialects is the borrowing of preverbs (verbal prefixes) from Slavic
- ▶ This borrowing must have taken place rather early — in 16–17th centuries before the split between the dialects.
- ▶ In the Romani dialects spoken in the Baltic countries, some additional preverbs of Baltic origin were borrowed in addition to the Slavic ones the set of preverbs; see (Belugin 1973; Ariste 1973; Kožanov 2011).

In this presentation we compare the systems of verbal modifiers of the two North-Eastern Romani dialects — Russian Romani and Latvian Romani (Lotfitka).

- ▶ First, we discuss the set of verbal modifiers, their frequency and semantics.
- ▶ Second, we discuss the relationship between the grammatical category of aspect and verbal modifiers in these dialects.

Data

- ▶ A corpus of transcribed field recordings made by KK from 2014 to 2016 in the Leningrad, Novgorod and Ryazan regions in Russia.
- ▶ About 52000 words.
- ▶ The corpus was morphologically annotated in Fieldworks Language Explorer (<https://software.sil.org/fieldworks/>)

For Latvian Romani we used collections of texts gathered by:

- ▶ Paul Ariste in Estonia in 1930s. In total around 30 thousand words.
 - ▶ Jānis Leimanis in Latvia in 1930s. In total about 42 thousand words.
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The list of verbal modifiers

Preverbs

The following preverbs are found in the Corpus of dialectal Russian Romani:

- ▶ *do-*: *džál* ‘go’ : ***do****džál* ‘reach’
- ▶ *na-* rarely: *phagirél* ‘break’ : ***na****phagirél* ‘break a certain amount’
- ▶ *ob-*: *džál* ‘go’ : ***ob****džál* ‘go around’
- ▶ *ot-*: *činél* ‘cut’ : ***ot****činél* ‘cut off’
- ▶ *piri-*: *džál* ‘go’ : ***piri****džál* ‘cross’
- ▶ *po-*: *rakirél* ‘speak’ : ***po****rakirél* ‘speak for a while’
- ▶ *pod-*: *džál* ‘go’ : ***pod****džál* ‘approach’
- ▶ *pri-*: *phandél* ‘tie’ : ***pri****phandél* ‘tie up’

The following preverbs are found in the Corpus of dialectal Russian Romani:

- ▶ *roz-*: *marél* ‘beat’ : ***rozmarél*** ‘break’
- ▶ *u-*: *džál* ‘go’ : ***udžál*** ‘go away’
- ▶ *v-*: *džál* ‘go’ : ***vdžál*** ‘enter’
- ▶ *vy-*: *lydžál* ‘carry’ : ***vylydžál*** ‘carry out’
- ▶ *z-*: *morél* ‘wash’ : ***zmorél*** ‘wash off’
- ▶ *za-*: *kamél* ‘want’ : ***zakamél*** ‘start wanting’

- ▶ The preverbs *iz-* and *vz-* are rare or completely absent.
- ▶ The preverb *z-* has a variant *is-*: *sphurijóm* ~ *isphurijóm* 'I got old'
- ▶ The preverb *vy-* has a (more archaic) variant *vi-*
- ▶ The preverbs do not have traces of "akanje"
- ▶ The preverbs have allomorphs, whose form depends in the voicedness of the initial sound of the stem, but have no allomorphs of the type *oto-*, *obo-*, *podo-* etc.
- ▶ The preverbs do not effect the stress in the verb form; cf. Rus. *pit'* : *výpit'* and RusRom. *pjél* : *vypjél*.

The following verbs were excluded from the statistics:

- ▶ the verb 'be' (the corpus has no examples of this verb being prefixed)
- ▶ loan verbs (both adapted and inserted)

Form	Simplex	Prefixed	Total
present	1790 (80%)	452 (20%)	2242 (100%)
past	956 (70%)	415 (30%)	1371 (100%)
imperfect	489 (88%)	65 (12%)	554 (100%)
subjunctive	323 (82%)	69 (18%)	391 (100%)
imperative	329 (89%)	41 (11%)	370 (100%)
infinitive	20 (87%)	3 (13%)	23 (100%)
Total	3907 (79%)	1045 (21%)	4952 (100%)

Preverb	Tokens	Types
<i>do-</i>	17 (1,6%)	6
<i>na-</i>	3 (0,3%)	2
<i>ob-</i>	17 (1,6%)	9
<i>ot-</i>	49 (4,7%)	14
<i>piri-</i>	26 (2,5%)	12
<i>po-</i>	345 (33,3%)	23 (<i>polél</i> ‘understand’ 257)
<i>pod-</i>	39 (3,7%)	10
<i>pri-</i>	44 (4,3%)	15
<i>pro-</i>	42 (4,1%)	15
<i>roz-</i>	53 (5,1%)	15
<i>s-</i>	99 (9,6%)	12
<i>u-</i>	82 (7,9%)	13
<i>vy-</i>	108 (10,4%)	27
<i>za-</i>	112 (10,8%)	41

There are four examples with two prefixes in the corpus: *po-za-*, *za-u-*, *na-do-*.

- (1) *mr-e* *čávor-e*, *xasij-ám*
my-dir.pl guy-VOC.PL perish-PST.1PL
po-za-mej-ám!
PVB-PVB-die-PST.1PL
'oh my people, we are done, we are dead!'

Preverb	Ariste's texts		Leimanis' texts	
	Tokens	Types	Tokens	Types
<i>do-</i>	3 (1,1%)	2	27 (8%)	13
<i>ie-</i>			8 (2,4%)	3
<i>no-</i>	19 (6,9%)	15	11 (3,3%)	9
<i>ob-</i>	15 (5,4%)	7	13 (3,9%)	8
<i>ab-</i>			1 (0,3%)	1
<i>ot-</i>	11 (4%)	5	24 (7,1%)	12
<i>at-</i>			6 (1,8%)	6
<i>pie-</i>	1 (0,4%)	1		
<i>po-</i>	14 (5,1%)	6	21 (6,3%)	15
<i>pa-</i>	1 (0,4%)	1	2 (0,6%)	2

Preverb	Ariste's texts		Leimanis' texts	
	Tokens	Types	Tokens	Types
<i>pše-</i>	13 (4,7%)	5	24 (7,1%)	9
<i>per-</i>	3 (1,1%)	1		
<i>roz-</i>			7 (2,1%)	6
<i>raz-</i>	2 (0,7%)	2		
<i>sa-</i>	4 (1,5%)	3	3 (0,9%)	3
<i>uz-</i>	4 (1,5%)	2	5 (1,5%)	4
<i>vi-</i>	39 (14,2%)	20	55 (16,4%)	32
<i>iz-</i>	3 (1,1%)	1		
<i>za-</i>	143 (52%)	39	120 (35,8%)	49
<i>aiz-</i>			9 (2,7%)	7

- ▶ The main bulk of the preverbs in Latvian Romani is of Slavic origin. Most of the Baltic preverbs are used only sporadically, apart from *no-*.
- ▶ In Lotfitka there are no preverbs like RusRom. *piri-* ‘over’, *pro-* ‘through’, but instead of both of them the preverb of Polish origin *pše-* (with a variant *pši-*) is used
- ▶ There is no exact semantic counterpart to RusRom. *pri-* ‘at, by’
- ▶ There are no preverbs RusRom. *s-* ‘with’ and *u-* ‘away’.

There are no examples with multiple prefixation in Lotfitka, apart from two cases in Leimanis's texts with the fossilized verb *dolel* 'get, obtain'

Verb particles

Verb particles are not used to modify verbs in Russian Romani, apart from some collocations, cf. *dža krig* ‘go away!’.

In Latvian Romani, verb particles are regularly used to modify verbs' semantics (not only spatial):

- (2) *Mukha-a buž'n'-a tele te jana-a*
 let-FUT.1SG goat-OBL.SG down and bring-FUT.1SG
šax ko ruu.
 cabbage.DIR.SG to wolf.DIR.SG
 'I will let down the goat and will bring the cabbage to
 the wolf' [Ar.]
- (3) *Kam-ja sawnakun-e gr-es' tele te*
 want-PST.3SG golden-OBL.SG horse-OBL.SG down CMPL
čor-el.
 steal-SBJ.3SG
 '[He] wanted to steal a golden horse' [Ar.]

Particle	Ariste's texts		Leimanis' texts	
	Tokens	Types	Tokens	Types
'inside': <i>andre</i>	119	13	27	13
'outside': <i>avri</i>	154	31	8	3
'on top': <i>opre</i>	125	22	1	1
'down': <i>tele, telal, talal</i>	119	32		
'nearby': <i>pašil, paše</i>	39	9		
'over': <i>pirdal, pirdel</i>	8	4		
'around': <i>truju, truja</i>	3	2		
'away': <i>krigal, krig</i>	27	8	13	8
'against': <i>preču</i>	17	8	24	12
'through': <i>durx</i>	7	4	11	9
'open': <i>pšīro, phīro</i>	21	5	6	6

Meaning	Lotfitka	Latvian
‘inside’	<i>andre</i>	<i>iekšā</i>
‘outside’	<i>avri</i>	<i>laukā</i>
‘through’	<i>durx</i>	<i>cauri</i>
‘away’	<i>krigal, krig</i>	<i>projām, prom</i>
‘on top’	<i>opre</i>	<i>viršū</i>
‘against’	<i>preču</i>	<i>pretī</i>
‘open’	<i>pširo</i>	<i>vaļā</i>
‘down’	<i>tele</i>	<i>nost, zemē</i>
‘around’	<i>truju</i>	<i>apkārt</i>

Most of verb particles are loan translations of Latvian verb particles. In most cases, these are Romani inherited spatial adverbs, but some of them are borrowed from Slavic (*preču*, *fardo*), and one, namely (*durx*), — from German.

Source	Preverbs		Particles	
	Tokens	Types	Tokens	Types
Ariste	275	67	630	61
Leimanis	337	89	126	34

The coappearance of a preverb and a verb particle in Lotfitka is rather rare (3 examples in Ariste's texts and 13 examples in Leimanis' texts).

- (4) *Vi-rakir-dža* *awri pes i vraz*
PVB-speak-PST.3SG out RFL and right.away
me-ja.
die-PAST.3SG
‘[she] outspoke and died right away’ [Ariste's texts]

Intermediate conclusions

- ▶ The set of preverbs in Russian Romani and Lotfitka is somewhat different, but, most probably, can be traced back to the common source — no "akanje no preverb *vz-*, possibly, with the original variant *vi-* (West Polesia?).
- ▶ In addition to the Slavic preverbs, Lotfitka borrowed some Baltic preverbs (frequent and productive only *no-*), but the basis is the system of preverbs remained Slavic.

- ▶ Lotfitka also developed a system of verb particles, semantically (but not always lexically) copying Latvian verb particles.
- ▶ The system of verb particles is based on Romani adverbs and adjectives, but there are borrowings *durx* (from German) and *fardo* (from Polish).

Verbal modifiers and aspectuality

In Baltic and Slavic (and more) preverbs are one of the main morphological ways to modify the aspectual characteristics of a verb, namely to perfectivize it, cf. Ltv. *darīt* ‘do’ (IPFV): ***padarīt*** ‘do’ (PFV); see, e.g., [Arkadiev 2015].

What happens in Romani dialects when the system of preverbs is borrowed from Slavic or Baltic?

In Russian Romani the category of aspect cannot be assigned to any verb, or, in other words, is not grammaticalized to the extent that we find in East Slavic; see [Rusakov 2001; Arkadiev 2017].

In some forms verbs (including prefixed ones) can have two aspectual interpretations.

Actional class	present, imperative, subjunctive	past, future	imperfect, compound future
processual	imperfective	imperfective	imperfective
telic	imperfective and perfective	perfective	imperfective

- (5) *lyj-á* *te* *ot-d-él* *lés-ke*
 take-PST.3SG CMPL PVB-give-SBJ.3SG 3M-DAT.SG
lov-é *kotyr-énca.*
 money-DIR.PL piece-INS.PL

‘[he] started to give him money in pieces’ (constructed example)

- (6) *phen-dóm* *lés-ke* *te* *ot-d-él*
 say-PST.1SG 3M-DAT.SG CMPL PVB-give-SBJ.3SG
sar-é *lov-é.*
 all-DIR.PL money-DIR.PL

‘I told him to give all the money back’ (constructed example)

Form	Perfective	Imperfective
present	0	330
future	110	0
compound future	0	0
past	419	1
imperfect	0	61
subjunctive	65	7
imperative	42	2

Such distribution of possible aspectual interpretations over different verb forms has developed under the influence of aspect/tense stems of East Slavic.

Thus, preverbs affect the actional characteristics of a verb, making it “telic”. Hence the aspectual interpretations of prefixed verbs in Russian Romani.

Form	Ariste's texts		Leimanis' texts	
	pf	impf	pf	impf
present	0	10	0	7
future	24	0	19	0
preterite	186	0	167	0
imperfect	0	1	0	13
subjunctive	14	2	41	5
imperative	19	0	9	2

In Latvian prefixed verbs and verbs with particles are often regarded as aspectual pairs, cf. [Staltmane 1958; Hauzenberga-Šturma 1979; Horiguchi 2014 etc.]
ieiet ‘enter (PFV)’ : *iet iekšā* ‘enter (IPFV)’

Form	Ariste's texts		Leimanis' texts	
	pf	impf	pf	impf
present	0	38	0	7
future	72	0	2	0
preterite	408	0	72	0
imperfect	0	0	0	0
subjunctive	28	13	15	4
imperative	43	4	9	0

As most Romani verbs are “perfective”, their combination with prefixes and particles are synonymous with no aspectual difference.

Preverbs change verbs’ actional characteristics, but verb particles do not?

There is only one example of a non-telic verb with a particle in Ariste's texts (and no examples in Leimanis' collection) — *rodél* 'look for', but with changed actionality:

- (7) *me* *l-en* *jake* *rod-a* *opre.*
1SG.NOM 3-OBL.PL this.way look.for-FUT.1SG up
'I will find them like this [with no additional effort]'
(Latv. *uzmeklēt*)

It seems that synonymity of prefixed verbs and verbs with particles is also manifested in the preference of preverbs or particles in certain meanings:

‘in’: Ariste’s texts have no preverbs with this meaning, and Leimanis’ collection contains 8 examples with the preverb *ie-*, but at the same time Ariste’s texts have 119 examples with the particle *andre* ‘inside’, and Leimanis has 27 examples.

The question of “empty preverbs” is essential in the discussion of aspectuality in Baltic and Slavic. “Empty” preverbs only “perfectivize” verbs without adding any lexical meaning, cf.

Rus. *деламъ* : *сделамъ*

Latv. *darīt* : ***padarīt***

In Russian Romani “empty” preverbs turn out to be optional, cf.
‘do (PFV)’: without preverbs — 60 examples, and with the
preverb (*s-*) — 5 examples

- (8) *patóm khér* *lač-ó* *ker-dé.*
then house.DIR.SG good-DIR.SG.M do-PST.3PL
‘then they built a good house’
- (9) *adáj khér* *s-ker-dé.*
here house.DIR.SG PVB-do-PST.3PL
‘here they built a house’

A similar phenomenon seems to exist in Latvian Romai, cf. the verb *čamudel* ‘kiss’

- (10) *Kral’ic-a d-ija capla kral’-is trui*
 queen-DIR.SG give-PST.3SG catch king-OBL.SG around
men i čamud-ija.
 neck.DIR.SG and kiss-PST.3SG
 ‘The queen embraced the king around his neck and
 kissed [him]’ [Ar.]
- (11) **No**-*čamud-ija l-es.*
 PVB-kiss-PST.3SG 3-OBL.SG.M
 ‘[She] kissed him’ [Ar.]

Conclusions

- ▶ Northeastern Romani dialects has borrowed the system of verbal modifiers from Slavic and Baltic.
- ▶ Preverbs are always MATter-borrowings, and most verb particles are PAT-tern borrowings.

- ▶ The differences in the system of preverbs evolved under the influence of new contact languages, but the outcome of the contact never repeats the system of the immediate contact language.
- ▶ The functions of verbal modifiers include modification of lexical meaning, change of argument structure, modification of verbs' actional characteristics. However borrowing of verbal modifiers does not lead to the re-arrangement of aspectuality in Romani.