

Sentences / Syntax

5.0

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Contrary to New Indo-Aryan languages with the verb in the final position or SOV order, Romani generally has (S)VO order in so-called neutral declarative sentences.

maiñne	laṛkī	dekhī	HINDI
S	O	V	
I	girl	saw	

'I saw a girl.'

(me)	dikhlom	rak'la	ROMANI
(S)	V	O	
I	saw	girl	

'I saw a girl.'

III.1 Syntactic Typology / General Word Order

As indicated by the brackets in the illustration 1, pronominal subjects are optional in Romani, because they are contained in the verbal ending. The position of the subject shows variance between categorical contrastive SV word order which, as in the example above, corresponds to the neutral declarative sentence, andthetic continuative VS word order, as demonstrated in the following final sequence of a Lovara fairy tale.

*Kadej šudas o Rom e benges perdal.
Taj tradine penge. Šingerdas pe o beng ande xoli,
sa mundardas pe ande stanki.*

*'Thus the Rom outwitted the Devil.
And they left. The Devil, however,
exploded with rage and dove into the rocks.'*

The change in the general word order from SOV to SVO is the result of the Europeanisation of Romani through contact with Greek and subsequently the languages of the Balkans. This alteration can also be seen in the dichotomy of factual and non-factual subordinating conjunctions mentioned above. Additional innovations include the relative clause, the use of prepositions and the definite article. Generally, these phenomena do not occur in the New Indo-Aryan languages on the Indian subcontinent.

NOUN PHRASE

In noun phrases, which can comprise a head NOUN (a noun or pronoun) and [OPTIONAL] constituents in a generally fixed order, the preposition is always in the initial position:

[PREPOSITION] + [DETERMINER] + [QUANTIFIER] + [ADJECTIVE] + NOUN + [optional]

The following example, a prepositional phrase with a post-posed noun phrase as an option extension, demonstrates all possible constituents in a noun phrase:

maškar	o	duj	phureder	phrala	mre	dadeskere
PREP	DET. NOM. PL.	NUM	ADJ. COMP	SUBST. NOM. PL	PRON. OBL	SUBST. OBL. GEN. PL
between	the	two	elder	brothers	my	father's

'between my father's two elder brothers'

As shown in the example above, the noun is generally in the nominative form when following prepositions. Exceptions are the aforementioned *bi* 'without' and *vaš* 'because of', which require the genitive and dative respectively:

bi grasteskero	'without horse'
vaš brišindeske	'because of rain'

ham	andar	odola	so	adaĵ	sam	me	som	i	lek	phuraneder	me	avilom	ti	dikhav	tumen
but	from	those	REL	here	are. 1PL	I	am. 1SG	ART	SUPER	old. COMP	I	came. 1SG	COMP	see. 1SG	you. PL
o	rom	kaj	dikhlem	les	iraki	jama	moginas	dava	te	bikinel	dopo	ŝuni	ti	hilo	mulo
ART	man	REL	saw. 1SG	he. OBL	yesterday	we	can. 1PL	this	COMP	try. 3SG	then	hear. 3SG	COMP	is. 3SG. MASC	dead. MASC
jon	phenen	kaj	o	rom	romedinevela	la	te	adale	adaĵ	ale	me	mange	fuat	džav	
they	say. 3PL	COMP	ART. SG. MASC	man	marry. 3SG. FUT	she. ACC	COMP	these	here	came. 3PL	I	me. DAT	away	go. 1SG	

III. 2 Kaleidoscope of sentences in various Romani varieties (source: Matras 2002)

Contrary to the nouns, which are in the nominative form in the majority of cases and varieties, pronouns following prepositions are usually locative-marked:

maškar amende	‘between us’
upre tute	‘above you’

Another distinctive feature of Romani is the genitive noun phrase with its “double case” where the case of the determining article correlates with the genitive attribute, which in turn correlates with the head noun in case, number and gender:

le	dad-es-ker-i	angrusti
DET. OBL	SUBST-OBL.SG-GEN.SG-NOM.SG. FEMSG.FEM	SUBST.NOM. SG.FEM

le dadeskeri angrusti ‘the father’s ring’ / ‘the ring of the father’

As shown in the introductory example, genitive nouns can also take the optional place after the head noun which does, however, not affect the “double case”. This is also demonstrated in the following example from Lovara Romani which shows the genitive plural suffix *-ger-* contracted to *-g-*:

kher	le	dil-en-g-o
SUBST.NOM. SG.MASK	DET. OBL	SUBST-OBL.PL-GEN.PL.-NOM. SG.MASK

While the postnominal position of genitives is quasi systemic in some Romani varieties, the attributes following the head noun of the noun phrase usually carry discourse-pragmatic functions:

... lengere rakle čore mule.	‘... their (PL) children (the) poor (ones) died.’
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Verb Position

The position of the verb depends – as shown initially – on discourse-pragmatic factors with regard to the subject. A similar, if softened, form applies to its position with regard to the object. Generally, the verb is positioned before the object – (S)VO. This applies to pronominal objects in particular: Even in Burgenland Romani, which like all other Vend varieties of the south central dialects shows a contact-induced tendency towards verbs in final positions, direct pronominal objects are usually positioned after the verb:

diklom len	‘I saw them (PL).’
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In contrast, nominal objects in Burgenland Romani are often found in front of the verb, most likely due to the influence of Hungarian contact varieties:

Idž leskero nevo auteri diklom.	‘Yesterday I saw his new car.’
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Indirect objects are usually positioned after direct ones. The verb position in interrogative sentences is the same as in declarative sentences:

Dikhav le grasten.	‘I see the horses.’
Dikhes le grasten?	‘Do you see the horses?’

Contact-induced word order is a characteristic which Romani shares with many other dominated languages. It is primarily rooted in the plurilingualism of adult Roma and the dominance of the primary contact language, i.e. the local majority language. The resulting contact-induced variance in Romani introduced in this section is further discussed in the following description of complex clauses.

me	na	džanav	sar	bučonahi	mangav	te	des	ma	o	pares	panč	džene	saven	khera	sin
I	NEG	know. 1SG	how	call. 3PL. REM	demand. 1SG	COMP	give. 2SG	me. OBL	ART. SG. MASC	money	five	person. PL	REL. OBL. PL	house. PL	is. 3PL
dopo	šuni	ti	hilo	mulo	phen	tra	dake	hot	te	mekel	len	mange	te	koštalinel	
then	hear. 3SG	COMP	is. 3SG. MASC	dead. MASC	say. IMP	your. OBL	mother. DAT	COMP	COMP	let. 3SG	them. OBL	me. DAT	COMP	taste. 3SG	
job	džajas	an	i	gačima	um	te	pilo	lovina	te	o	grencn	cu	ojanahi	feder	ovlahi
he	go. 3SG. REM	in	ART. FEM	pub	COMP	COMP	drink. 3SG. MASC	beer	COMP	ART. PL	borders	shut	be. SUBJ. 3PL.REM	better	is. SUBJ. 3SG.ROM

III. 2

Complex Clauses

The word order in subordinate clauses is generally the same as that of main clauses and displays the (S)VO order described above.

Relative Clauses

As with other European languages, Romani also uses relative clauses. The most commonly occurring elements introducing relative clauses (“relativiser”) are *kaj* ‘where’ and *so* ‘what’.

i zumi, so kerd'a lenge, ...	‘the soup which she made for them...’
o murš, kaj alo idž, ...	‘the man who arrived yesterday ...’

If the relative clause’s head noun does assume non-subject roles, resumptive pronouns are obligatory. In this function we find *kon* ‘who’ and *savo* ‘which’, which correlate with the reference-noun of the main clause.

le gadžes, kaskero le grasten si, ...	‘Gadžo, whom the horses belong to, ...’
panč džene, saven khera si, ...	‘five people who own houses ...’

Verb Complements

Complements of epistemic verbs describing independent and real processes and conditions are marked by the factual or epistemic conjunction *kaj*; modal complements are introduced by the non-factual or modal conjunction *te*, which occurs as *ti* in some varieties.

phenen, kaj lakero phral dikhla la, ...	‘they say, that her brother saw her, ...’
o X. mangela ti čumidel la, ...	‘X wants to kiss her...’

While *te/ti* are rarely substituted by loans, *kaj* is often replaced: In Vlax varieties by the functionally equivalent Romanian *kê* or *ke*; in varieties under Greek influence by the also equivalent Greek *oti*; in central varieties by the Hungarian *hod/hodž/hod'/hot/hoj* < hun. *hogy*.

The conjunction *te/ti* marks modal and aspectual verb complements as well as direct statements.

kamen grasten te bikinel	‘they want to sell horses’
astaren te khelen	‘they begin to dance’
adava te keres	‘you should do that’

In the first example, *te* marks the complement of the modal verb ‘to want’, in the second one that of the inchoative verb *astaren* ‘to begin’. The last example is a directive speech act which in English is expressed by the use of the modal verb ‘should’.

Adverbial Clauses

Generally, adverbial clauses are introduced by semantically specified conjunctions which can be roughly divided into three categories: The first two consist of the conjunctions *kaj* and *te* which, as in their function as verb complements, differ with regard to their factuality. The third category comprises all those subordinate conjunctions which are based on inter-

final	te/ti, kaj te, hot te, kə te, ja te, či te	‘in order to, so as to, so that’
conditional	te, bi/by, ako, -se, kana, kada, an te; ob te, či/čy, dali, li, mi	‘if, in case, provided’
consecutive	te/ti, kaj te, hot kaj; bi te, oni te	‘so that, so, without’
causal	kaj, kə/ke, vajl, anda kodo ke, sostar, soske, sar, adake, sar, sebepi kaj, afu, jati, zere, bo, mer, jer, lebo, pošto	‘because, as’
concessive	xoč, hjaba kaj, trocdem kaj, sa jekh ke, jeva	‘despite, in spite of, although, even though, whereas,...’
local	kaj; katar	‘where (to/from)’
temporal anterior	sar/syr/har, angla sar, angla kodo ke, bi te na, prin te; dži kaj, dži te, bis te, džikim, bisko, medig	‘before; since’
temporal simultaneous	kana, kada/keda, sar/har/syr, kaj, so, afu	‘while, whilst, as, when’
temporal posterior	kana, kada/keda, sar/har/syr, kaj, so, posle, čim, pala kodo ke, akana, jekh kaj, jekh ta	‘after’

III.4 Subordinate clauses and conjunctions

rogatives or which correspond to these. The non-factual *te/ti* introduces final, conditional and consecutive clauses.

phend'om lake, te anel amenge mol	‘I tell her to get us some wine’
te sas man baxt, ...	‘if I were lucky, ...’
buti kerel, bi te kerel love	‘he works without making any money’

In contrast, *kaj* introduces causal clauses:

avav, kaj akard'an man	‘I come because you called’
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An example for the third category is the interrogative pronoun *kana* ‘when’ in its function as a conjunction with temporal, simultaneous meaning:

arakhav, kana soves	‘I stand watch while you sleep’
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Additionally, variety-specific loans which either completely replace the original conjunctions or which occur simultaneously with these; combinations of elements of the three categories with loan conjunctions, prepositions and other particles may also occur. The following table shows an incomplete list of types of subordinate clauses and conjunctions based on purely semantic criteria [III.4].

Bibliography

An extended description of the syntax of Romani is presented in chapter 7 “Syntactic typology” in:
Yaron Matras (2002) *Romani. A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 165-191.