

ROMANI ROMANES

INTRODUCTION

Dear teachers, teaching assistants, students, and all others interested in the Romani language,

We present here, in pilot form, our new Romani teaching materials “Romani Romanes“. The collection of ten lessons is divided into two parts: eight lessons are devoted to the North Central dialect of Romani (formerly called “Slovak Romani“), while two are for the Lovari dialect of Romani. Each of these two parts has its own key, in which we give correct or recommended answers to the exercises.

The lessons in their current shape do not form a comprehensive textbook, or even a comprehensive part of a textbook. Their aim is to represent various degrees of progression. They develop understanding of certain grammar points and vocabulary, but above all they aim to show a way in which Romani can be taught by native speakers, or by a non-native speaker working together with a native-speaker teaching assistant.

Unlike classic textbooks, the central point of each lesson is not an article but a teaching video, which gives the lesson its title and which also forms the base for some of the exercises. In some lessons the video is complemented by further teaching materials – e.g. an audio recording, or a diagram.

Some exercises in the various lessons are similar, while others explore the given topic, video dialogue or grammar point from various angles. The aim here is to demonstrate various possible approaches to the material, and various ways of working with Romani. As far as we are concerned, the materials are not a binding instrument for the teaching of Romani. We will be glad if teachers (and teaching assistants) decide to adapt the exercises in keeping with the individual needs of the students and their experience from previous lessons, taking some tasks away, adding others, or thinking up completely new types of exercise. We also hope our materials will provide inspiration for teaching other topics and grammatical features that are not covered in these materials.

One of our tried and tested methods of teaching Romani, and one that we would like to encourage you to use, is conversation. During conversation we focus above all on fluency and

effective communication, and not so much on detailed understanding of every last word and grammar point. Conversation may be led by any teacher with a command of fluent Romani, but it is a great advantage if the teacher or assistant is a native speaker.

When working with advanced pupils we have found the following method to be effective: Students first listen to a short narrative with a point (about ten minutes long) in Romani about something with which they are unacquainted. It is narrated by the teacher or assistant, but in further lessons these narratives are also prepared by individual pupils. Nothing is translated, no one may take any notes, and neither teachers nor pupils use any other language than Romani for the whole lesson. After the story has ended, the narrator begins to tell it again (not necessarily in exactly the same words) but this time divides it into parts. After each part, one of the students retells that part, once again in his or her own words. A further possibility is to ask questions about the story told, or to react to it in some other way.

It is important in this approach to prioritise live, communicative Romani and the overall meaning of the story rather than an analysis of all the words and their forms. We partly develop this approach in the conversations in the teaching videos that we make available here. With the exception of the first few lessons, where the dialogues follow a clear script avoiding any sort of complicated grammar and vocabulary, these conversations feature improvisation by native speakers within a framework situation. Some videos, or parts of them, were re-recorded, but we tried to do this as little as possible. Instead we recorded several different videos and then did not use those that were least suitable for teaching. The result is natural and spontaneous Romani conversation with correct pronunciation and intonation.

This method obviously carries the risk that the student will sometimes hear a grammatical form that is not only unfamiliar

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but which it is too soon to learn analytically. In such an event the teacher may simply translate the word without explaining it too much. A further risk is that students will occasionally hear a relatively uncommon dialect form in the videos, something that is said differently by the great majority of Romani speakers. Once again, this is an opportunity for the teacher to draw attention to the dialect word and thus enrich students' understanding. The third risk of the spontaneous speech in some videos is the large number of loan words from majority languages. These are either words that are regularly used in the speaker's community and are part of the living Romani language there, or the speaker was momentarily unable to remember a more "Romani" word that he or she had not used for a long time. These loan words also provide an opportunity for the teacher: to tell students that these words form a lively part of real-life language, while at the same time pointing them in the direction of more original Romani alternatives. We have outlined such a path in one of the lessons, with an exercise where the students have to find unnecessary loan words and try to replace them with words from original word roots.

We believe the positives of the chosen solution considerably outweigh the risks, and that not only the videos but all the teaching materials will be of benefit to you.

As far as explanations of grammar and vocabulary are concerned, in the lessons on North Central Romani these are based above all on the following textbook:

Šebková, Hana, Žlnayjová, Edita: Romaňi čhib. Učebnice slovenské romštiny. Praha: Fortuna 1999

(Slovak version: Šebková, Hana, Žlnayová, Edita: Romaňi čhib – učebnica rómčiny (severocentrálny dialekt). Košice, Bohemia kontakt/Fortuna, 2002)

We took a different approach, however, in the case of Lovari Romani, for which no comprehensive teaching material exists as yet in this country. We have therefore added a basic grammatical overview to the lessons. After the transcripts of the teaching videos come the words used in that lesson plus basic phrases and their translations.

Finally, we would like to add some useful internet links:

Romlex dictionary (on the right you can choose dialects and languages and, with the arrow, the direction of translation, for example East Slovak Romani, which is essentially North Central Romani, and the language into which you wish to translate. You may search for words or their parts and translate them from Romani into majority languages, or vice versa:

<http://romani.uni-graz.at/romlex/lex.xml>

Our Charles University Romani support website, featuring a dictionary of Romani neologisms, a dictionary of Lovari Romani and an explanation of Romani orthography:

<https://romstina.ff.cuni.cz/index.php>

Teaching materials for the Qualirom project:

http://qualirom.uni-graz.at/home_cs.html

Website of the Romani studies journal Romani džaniben:

www.dzaniben.cz

Romani teaching publications produced by the State Pedagogical Institute in Bratislava:

<https://www.statpedu.sk/sk/o-organizacii/projekty/spolu-romami-dosiahneme-viac/publikacie/>

And in conclusion the most important links:

Our video and audio materials for the individual lessons are online here:

for North Central Romani:

<https://blogg.sh.se/romstuduni/northcentral-romani/>

for Lovari Romani:

<https://blogg.sh.se/romstuduni/lovari-romani/>

We wish you much inspiration in teaching Romani.

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authors**