

Some linguistic peculiarities of Romani-origin words in the ethnolinguistic repertoire of the Romungros

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes some linguistic peculiarities of Romani-origin words in the ethnolinguistic repertoire of the Romungros (ERR), a non-standard Hungarian variety spoken by the descendants of South Central Romani speakers. Based on empirical data, we examine various linguistic features, showing that ERR exhibits reduced morphological complexity alongside increased lexical and phonological complexity. We demonstrate that the innovative features of ERR, such as its flexibility in incorporating Romani roots, the use and the reinterpretation of Romani linguistic features and the violations of the grammatical rules of standard Hungarian are rooted in linguistic creativity and serve to mark group identity.

KEYWORDS

non-standard Hungarian, Romani, Para-Romani, ethnolinguistic repertoire, linguistic creativity

1. INTRODUCTION

The language shift from Romani to various local majority languages has led to the emergence of several contact varieties across Europe that are based on the majority language but also incorporate varying degrees of Romani lexicon and, in some cases, grammatical features of Romani origin. Examples include Angloromani, Caló, Basque Romani, Dortika, Finikas and

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Scandinavian Romani (Bakker 2020), along with Romani ethnolects found in the Czech (Bořkovcová 2006) and Finnish contexts (Salo 2017). These varieties have been given various names such as creoles, Romani mixed dialects, Para-Romani varieties, ethnolects, or secret languages (see in Matras et al. 2007, 144) and have more recently been described as registers or styles of the respective majority language (Matras 2002, 246).¹

Since the second half of the twentieth century, literature on Romani (for an overview, see Bodnárová and Baló, 2025) has noted the existence of a contact variety in which a Romani lexicon is incorporated into Hungarian and is spoken by the so-called Romungro² group in Hungary. However, these claims have not been supported by systematic research and data collection. Our paper aims to address this gap by presenting the first comprehensive effort to gather and analyse linguistic data on this variety, and exploring the linguistic characteristics of Romani-origin words as used within a specific form of Hungarian spoken by the descendants of South Central Romani³ speakers in Hungary. The variety examined, which we term the ethno-linguistic repertoire of the Romungros (ERR), was introduced in Bodnárová and Baló (2025), following Benor's concept of ethnolinguistic repertoires (Benor 2010).

The speakers of ERR, identified in Bodnárová and Baló (2025), include descendants of South Central Romani speakers, regardless of their current Romani language proficiency, geographic background (urban or rural), or traditional profession (e.g. musicians or nailors). ERR is primarily an in-group variety, though it may also be adopted by non-Romani individuals who are part of the close-knit social circles of ERR speakers of Romani origin.

Although ERR is predominantly based on the structure and vocabulary of colloquial Hungarian, it is enriched, based on individual speaker repertoires, with Romani-derived lexicon and ethnolectal elements. The flexible use of this special vocabulary shows similarities to the Romani-derived vocabulary of English Gypsies described by Matras (2010, 20), as speakers of ERR have the autonomy to selectively incorporate Romani elements into the majority language based on audience and context. The size of the lexicon of ERR varies across individual speakers, with estimates from our consultants suggesting a range from 15 to 100 items. These items mostly consist of Romani-derived content words, with some function words and a few calques,

¹Some early studies regarded Para-Romani varieties, which have been documented solely in historical sources from the seventeenth century onward (see Bakker 2020, 373–377), as distinct languages, characterised by an overwhelmingly Romani lexicon within the grammatical framework of the majority language.

²As noted by Elšík, Hübschmannová & Šebková (1999, 279), the term *Romungro* or *Rumungro*, derived from combining *rom* 'Romani man' with *ungro* 'Hungarian', was originally used by Vlax Roma to describe the settled Romani communities in Hungary and Slovakia. While some Romani communities have accepted this designation, others still view it as derogatory. In the absence of a more fitting term, we will use *Romungro* here to refer to this group, as other widespread terms like *magyar cigányok* (Hungarian Roma) or *muzsikus cigányok* (musician Roma) could imply all Romani groups in Hungarian-speaking areas or only those traditionally engaged in music.

³The heritage Romani dialect of the Roma who arrived from the fourteenth century onward and were the first Romani group to settle in the Carpathian Basin is referred to in the linguistic literature as South Central Romani or Carpathian Romani.

especially in the realm of curses and oaths (e.g. *haljak meg*, lit. ‘may I die’ < R. *te merav*).⁴ Additionally, the variety includes dialectal and archaic Hungarian expressions and occasional borrowings from other Romani dialects encountered by speakers (for details, see Bodnárová and Baló, 2025).

In this paper, we focus on the Romani-origin words of the ERR lexicon, especially on those that have been preserved from the heritage language. The linguistic peculiarities described here, such as phonological variation, adaptation strategies and morphological innovations are restricted to Romani-origin words and do not extend to the Hungarian vocabulary. Our data, drawn from a wide range of sources as outlined in Section 2, capture the diversity of ERR as spoken by different individuals and across different regions. Acknowledging the considerable differences observed between various speakers and regions, we will discuss the shared linguistic features while highlighting those unique to specific localities or speakers when necessary. Examples from unpublished sources will be presented without specific citations, except for those from published works. While a substantial part of the Romani-origin words found in ERR are also present in other non-standard varieties of Hungarian (Rosenberg 2021, 341), they make up only a small fraction of those varieties (Kis 1997, 243). Additionally, ERR speakers view their repertoires as clearly distinct from other non-standard Hungarian varieties.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, we describe the corpus and the methods used for collecting the example sentences. This is followed by a discussion on the origin and use of some typical phonological features (Section 3) and the adaptation and integration strategies employed in incorporating Romani vocabulary into Hungarian (Section 4). In Section 5, we examine word formation, focusing on productive Hungarian patterns, provide a brief overview of the remnants of Romani derivational morphology, and discuss other morphological strategies rooted in linguistic creativity. A brief section on retained features of inflectional morphology follows in Section 6, and finally, we explore the forms and use of the copula in Section 7, and outline some interesting semantic and functional changes in Section 8.

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Our paper is based on a collection of example sentences demonstrating the use of ERR features. The dataset, comprising 2,143 sentences, was compiled from a range of written and oral sources, which we categorise as either primary or secondary and as published or unpublished (see Table 1). This corpus was used to develop a lexicon of ERR, with the source of each lexical item indicated. Most of the data illustrate the use of ERR in urban areas such as Budapest, Gödöllő, Szolnok, and Szeged. However, the origin of some social media posts remains undetermined.

The published sources contain 1,087 sentences and were extracted mostly from primary sources (979 examples). These include books by Romani writers such as Csemer (1994,

⁴Henceforth, examples from ERR are transcribed using an orthographic system based on the contemporary Hungarian alphabet. Conversely, examples from Romani, the heritage language, are transcribed following the most widely used conventions in academic papers discussing Romani linguistics. For example, in Hungarian orthography, long vowels are marked by an acute accent (e.g. á, é, í, ó, ú), while in Romani linguistics, vowel length is typically indicated by a macron (e.g. ā, ē, ī, ō, ū).

Table 1. Number of example sentences by data type

	Published	Unpublished
Primary sources	979 (texts by Romani authors)	275 (social media posts)
Secondary sources	108 (texts by non-Romani authors citing Romani sources)	781 (sociolinguistic interviews)
Total	1,087	1,056

2001a, 2001b) and Péliné Nyári (1996, 1998), who incorporate ERR features into their literary works. A smaller portion of the published data comes from secondary sources (108 examples), written by non-Romani authors who cite Romani sources. They include some newspaper articles from the early twentieth century (e.g. Petschauer 1936), tales narrated by József Héderváry which were collected and published in Bartos (1958), and songs performed by Roma in the northern Hungarian village of Csenyété and recorded in Kovalcsik & Kubínyi (2000), among others.

The unpublished dataset consists of 1,056 example sentences. Of these, 781 sentences were gathered from sociolinguistic interviews, conducted for qualitative research, following Briggs (2005). These interviews, carried out by the authors and their colleague, aimed in part at collecting lexical data through example sentences. The sessions included 11 consultants and totaled 17 h of individual and group discussions. These consultants self-identify as Roma and recognise that they use various words and phrases, primarily of Romani origin, predominantly within their families and the Romani community. An additional 275 sentences were collected from social media, particularly posts from public Facebook pages, profiles, and groups. To address ethical concerns and protect user privacy (see Borchers, Rosenberg & Swartzentruber 2023), social media posts are not quoted directly in the paper, while in the case of the interviews, informed consent was sought and granted.

3. PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

The phoneme inventory of ERR largely coincides with that of Hungarian, which explains why original Romani stems are integrated into Hungarian without any alteration in the vast majority of cases.

Due to the lack of audio data capturing natural speech, we can only speculate about the intonation of ERR at present. Based on some sources, such as Pesti cigányok (1937), Maácz (1983) and Kovalcsik & Kubínyi (2000), it seems that there is or may have been some form of distinct intonation.

3.1. Consonants

Lenition and fortition are not unusual: *tubálo* < R. *thuvālo* ‘cigarette’ and *luvnya* < R. *lubnji*, alongside *lubnya* ‘whore’. There are, however, a few items which display less frequent sound changes along the voiced plosives /b/, /d/ and /g/. For instance, sound changes involving these plosives can be seen in examples like *csundar* < R. *čungar* ‘spit’ and *lugnyi*, another form of

R. *lubnji* ‘whore’, mentioned above. Additionally, in Szeged ERR, *gogyálo* ‘smart’ has changed to *bogyálo*. These appear to be extreme cases of “random phonological variation” (Matras 2010, 99), which were also encountered in Angloromani.

Sound changes may also occur when a word is borrowed into ERR through non-standard Hungarian varieties. For instance, the word *bibas* ‘wretch’, documented alongside the original *bibas(z)t* < R. *bibast* ‘misfortune’, likely entered ERR via the mocking imitation of Romani speech documented as early as the nineteenth century (for *bibas*, see, for example, Egyveleg 1858). This imitation often features a sound change from /s/ to /ʃ/, which is unrelated to Romani phonology or authentic Romani speech patterns.⁵

Aspirated stops are found in Romani (see Baló 2020, 134–135), but not in Hungarian. They function as free variants rather than distinct phonemes in ERR. The aspirates /tʰ/ and /tʰ/ have disappeared (however, see below for the innovative use of the aspirate /tʰ/ in the Szeged variety of ERR), leaving only the non-aspirated forms, such as *csandel* < R. *čhandel* ‘vomit V’ and *tovel* < R. *thovel* ‘put’. Words containing the aspirate /tʰ/ were not documented, while the aspirates /pʰ/ and /kʰ/ have only been preserved in some words and appear as free variants of their non-aspirated counterparts in syllable-initial positions, in words like *phe.nel* ~ *pe.nel* ‘say, tell’, *phu.ri* ~ *pu.ri* ‘old’, *khan.del* ~ *kan.del* ‘stink’, or *di.khel* ~ *di.kel* ‘see, look’. The word *bokhaló* ‘hungry’ has also been attested in ERR, while its unaspirated counterpart (**bokaló*) does not exist. Originally, it also contains /kʰ/ in a syllable-initial position, but the syllabic structure has most likely been reinterpreted, and a syllable boundary has been inserted between the /k/ and /h/ sounds: *bok.ha.ló*.

Aspirated sounds may also appear in contexts where they are not typically expected, a phenomenon we refer to as a pseudo-Romani feature that aims to enhance, in this case, the Romani-like sound of the special vocabulary (see also Sections 4.2 and 5.3). Examples include the words *dzsukhel* ‘dog’ and the phrase *the merav* ‘may I die’, containing the aspirated /kʰ/ and /tʰ/ in the ERR of Szeged, although none of these sounds is actually aspirated in Romani (cf. R. *džukel* and *te merav*). This phenomenon has recently become particularly noticeable in written form, especially among speakers of ERR on social media platforms who are engaged in re-learning Romani.

Under the influence of Hungarian, the Romani /x/ sound became /h/ in South Central Romani, and many words used in ERR also reflect this change, e.g. *hóli* < R. *hōli* < R. *xoli* ‘anger’. However, there are some instances where ERR words exhibit the sound change /x/ > /k/, such as in the widely used *baktaló* ‘lucky’ (< R. *baxtalo*) or in the words *kajel* ‘eat’ (< R. *xal*) and *kokavel* (< R. *roxavel*) ‘lie V’ used in the ERR of Szolnok. This may suggest that these words were borrowed into ERR before the sound change /x/ > /h/ took place in the heritage Romani dialect, or they may have been borrowed from another Romani dialect spoken in the area, such as Vlach Romani or Sinti Romani, which do not exhibit this change.

ERR contains the palatal consonants /c/, /j/ and /ɲ/. These are not part of the basic Romani consonant inventory but palatalisation processes have taken place in several dialects after

⁵It is, however frequently used in the stereotypical portrayal of the Hungarian speech of the Roma, as mentioned, for instance, by Juhász (1932, 223), and also prominently featured in the speech of the character of Sárközi, “the pock-marked gypsy” in one of the most widely read Hungarian novels, Géza Gárdonyi’s *Egri csillagok* (known in English as *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon*, in George F. Cushing’s translation), first published in 1901, perhaps suggesting that they are toothless and therefore have difficulty pronouncing the sounds /s/ and /z/.

Romani had come into contact with Greek and other European languages (Boretzky 2001, 110). In South Central Romani, the main source of ERR, inflected forms contain palatal consonants but the singular nominative forms are not palatalised, e.g. *būti* ‘work NOM’ [ˈbuːti] and *būtja* ‘work OBL’ [ˈbuːca] (Baló 2020, 143). The ERR items containing palatal consonants, such as *romnyi* alongside *romni* ‘Romani woman’, *bútyi* alongside *búti* ‘work’ *gógyi* alongside *gódi* ‘wits, brains’ or *pányi* alongside *páni* ‘water’ may go back to the corresponding inflected forms. Other potential sources of the palatal consonants include South Central Romani varieties that have by now become extinct (Vekardi 2000 reports palatal consonants in some of these words in South Central Romani), or interference with Vlax Romani, where the singular nominative forms also have palatal consonants.

3.2. Vowels

Distinctive vowel length was introduced into South Central Romani through contact with Hungarian (Bodnárová & Wiedner, 2020, 312). The distribution of long and short vowels is relatively well preserved in the Romani stems used in ERR, such as the short vowel in *csalav-* (< R. *čalav-*) ‘hit, beat V’ or *lukeszt-* (< R. *lukest-*) ‘soldier’, and the long vowel in *csár-* ‘stimulate the female genitalia orally’ (< R. *čār-* ‘lick’) or *búty-* (< R. *būt-*) ‘work N’. Adjectives that originally display phonemic length alternation in the penultimate syllable (Bodnárová & Wiedner, 2022), with short vowels in attributive positions and long vowels in predicative positions, may appear in ERR with either a short or a long vowel, e.g. *dzsungáló* ~ *dzungaló* ‘ugly’. Nouns and adjectives ending in *-o* in Romani may alternatively exhibit a final long vowel in ERR, e.g. *máro* ~ *máró* ‘bread’, *baro* ~ *baró* ‘great, big’.

A typical feature of ERR is the use of Romani items in ways that violate the backness harmony inherent to Hungarian grammar (for an overview, see Törkenczy 2011). Not surprisingly, Romani-origin words containing back vowels take back harmonising inflectional suffixes (e.g. *aszal-nak* ‘laugh-3PL.PRS’); however, Romani-origin words containing one or more of the front vowels referred to as neutral when discussing Hungarian vowel harmony, [i i: e e:], also take the very same, back harmonising suffixes, in spite of the fact that in Hungarian most roots containing only neutral vowels take a front harmonising suffix when inflected.⁶ Examples include *penel-jad* instead of **penel-jed* ‘say-2SG.IMP’, *dikhel-juk* instead of **dikhel-jük* ‘see-1PL.PRS’, *szinyel-ok* instead of **szinyel-ek* ‘be-1SG.PRS’, *del-tak* instead of **del-tek* ‘give-3PL.PST’. As the examples show, there appears to be a complete lack of harmony in favour of the back vowel alternant of otherwise harmonising sets of suffixes within the Romani-origin vocabulary of ERR. Invariant suffixes are very rare in the inflectional system of Hungarian (see Rebrus 2000 for an overview of Hungarian suffixes and their classification); hence, the exclusive application of back vowel suffixes to Romani-origin words in ERR is very unusual, especially in light of the

⁶There is a closed set of about sixty, mostly monosyllabic, all-neutral stems (including both verbs and nouns) that take the back alternant of a harmonising suffix, e.g. *hív* ‘call’ > *hív-jad* ‘call-2SG.IMP’ instead of **hív-jed*. These are generally referred to as antiharmonic roots.

fact that the inflectional suffixes which do not alternate in ERR are those that are some of the most typical examples of harmonising suffixes in Hungarian otherwise.⁷

4. ADAPTATION AND INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

4.1. Verbs

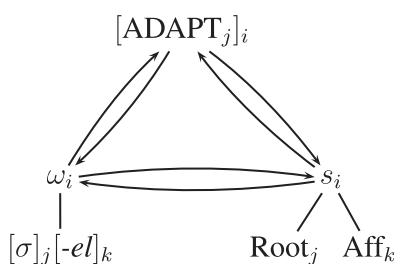
Hungarian is not unique in that it inserts borrowed verbs by obligatorily adding an adaptation marker to the root if this root does not exist as a noun in Hungarian (Kiefer & Ladányi 2000, 195; Ladányi 2007, 106; Varga 2020, 57–63).⁸ One of these adaptation markers is *-(V)l*, where the vowel component can be [o~ε~ø], in accordance with Hungarian backness and roundness harmony. A fourth variant containing the vowel [ɔ] also exists but only when it is used as an internal denominal derivational suffix after a certain, phonologically determined subset of a closed set of about 200, so-called lowering nominal roots (Törkenczy 2011).

When we take a look at some of the Romani verb roots, the pattern appears to work: R. *phen* ‘say’ > ERR *pen-el*; R. *cid* ‘pull’ > ERR *cid-el*, *dikh* ‘look, see’ > ERR *dik-el*. However, if we look at the whole inventory of ERR verbs ending in *-el*, we find many more examples that seem to contradict this pattern by violating vowel harmony: *šun* ‘hear, listen’ > *sun-el* instead of **sun-ol*, *rod* ‘search’ > *rod-el* ‘seek, search’ instead of **rod-ol*, *mang* ‘ask, beg’ > *mang-el* instead of **mang-ol*, etc. These forms happen to be identical to the original, third person singular present indicative Romani forms of the verbs: *šunel* ‘he/she hears’, *rodel* ‘he/she seeks’, *mangel* ‘he/she asks’. As the form of the Romani third person singular inflectional ending coincides with one allomorph of the Hungarian adaptation marker *-(V)l*, we may assume that the string *-el* was reinterpreted as an invariant adaptation marker. This is corroborated by the fact that it is also used after roots that cannot take the third person singular *-el* suffix in Romani, such as nouns (e.g. *kulel* ‘defecate V’ < R. *khul* ‘faeces N’ and *bútyel* ‘work V’ < the oblique stem *bútj-* of R. *būti* ‘work N’; see Section 8 for more details on functional shift), perfective stems (e.g. *szútyel* ‘sleep V’ < R. *sútj-* or *hájel/kajel* ‘eat’ < R. *hāj-/xaj-*), truncated stems (e.g. *murdel* ‘die’, related to R. *murdav* ‘die’ and *murdar* ‘kill’; see Section 4.3 for more details on truncation), or the third person singular present tense form of the copula in ERR, *szinyel* (see Section 7 for more details).⁹ The pattern may also be expressed in the form of a schema (see Figure 1), as defined in the framework of Construction Morphology (see Booij 2010; Baló 2021 for details).

⁷As Törkenczy (2011) reports, most of the antiharmonic roots have [i i:], and a handful have [e:] in their final syllable, with the exception of one allomorph, *derek* [derek], of one stem, *derék* [derek] ‘waist’. As most of the Romani stems have the fourth neutral vowel, [ɛ] in their final syllable, their treatment in ERR is also unusual in relation to antiharmony.

⁸Romani dialects follow a similar strategy. For example, South Central Romani uses the adaptation marker *-in-*, e.g. *kezdin-* < H. *kezd* ‘start’. However, Hungarian differs from Romani in that the adaptation marker is originally a derivational marker, so it employs a strategy which is called derivational adaptation by Pakerys (2016), while the markers used in Romani solely serve the adaptation process and were originally borrowed from Greek (cf. e.g. Boretzky & Iglá 1991; Bakker 1995).

⁹The use of a front adaptational suffix on stems with back vowels is similar to the antiharmony we see on some recent German and English loans into Hungarian, which invariably take the back allomorph *-ol* in spite of the fact that their stems have only neutral vowels or a final front vowel (e.g. *csekk-ol* ‘check’ < E. *check*, *sib-ol* ‘smuggle’ < G. *schieben* ‘push’); see Törkenczy (2011) and the literature therein for details.

Figure 1. Schema for the suffix *-el*

The forms ending in *-el* are then treated as the third person singular form of the derived verb, as it is usual in Hungarian, and may serve as the input of regular Hungarian inflectional patterns, albeit without vowel harmony (see Section 3.2), e.g. *deltak* ‘they gave’ (instead of **deltek*), *dikhelta* (instead of **dikhelte*) ‘he/she saw DEF’, *penelom* (instead of **penelem*) ‘I say DEF’, *penelják* (instead of **penelik*) ‘they say DEF’, *pieltak* (instead of **pieltek*) ‘they drank’. In Hungarian, stems containing a back vowel and an /*ε*/ vacillate in terms of the personal ending, because /*ε*/ is “variably transparent”, as can be seen in examples borrowed from ERR into Hungarian: *murdel-ek/ok* ‘I die’, *kamel-em/om* ‘I love DEF’ (Rebrus & Törkenczy 2019, 286–295). In ERR, however, the back harmonising suffix is preferred (see the schema in Figure 2), in line with the lack of vowel harmony (see Section 3.2): *dzsanelod* (instead of **dzsaneled*) ‘you know DEF’, *roveltunk* (instead of **roveltünk*) ‘we cried’.

More support for this analysis comes from the existence of forms such as *aszal* ‘laugh’ and *dzsál* ‘go’, both going back to the Romani third person singular forms of the verbs, *asal* and *džal*. An ambiguous case is presented by the verb form *darel* ‘be afraid’. One potential source may be Hungarian slang, into which it may have been borrowed from the Sinti dialect of Romani via prison slang, in which the third person singular form is *darel*. Another source may be the addition of the *-el* suffix to a hypothetical *dar-* stem. The third person singular form of this verb is *daral* and the root is *dara-* in the main source of ERR, the South Central Romani dialect, so while we would expect the form *daral*, similarly to *aszal* and *džsal*, which is, incidentally, also asserted in our data, it is also possible that the form was reanalysed as a one-syllable stem like those seen above, and the invariant suffix *-el* was added.

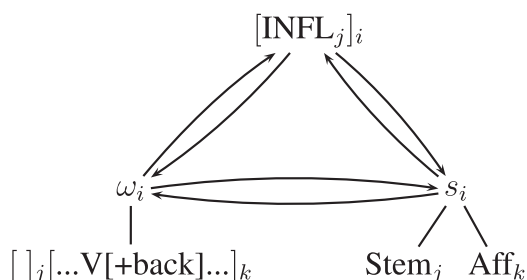


Figure 2. Schema for the obligatory back vowel in otherwise harmonising inflectional suffixes

A subgroup of the verbs derived in this manner are those that end in *-avel*, most of which contain the original Romani transitive marker *-av-*: *basavel* ‘play music’, *csalavel* ‘beat, hit’, *daravel* ‘be afraid’, *dzsilavel* ‘sing’, *kokavel* ‘lie V’, *malavel* ‘beat, hit’. There are two examples which do not exist in Romani: *dzsavel* ‘go’ and *potyavel* ‘pay’ (instead of R. *potjinel*, which also exists in ERR as *potyinél*). According to Szabó (2005, 80), the form *dzsavel* is a result of contamination, the combination of R. *džal* ‘go’ and R. *avel* ‘come’, yielding the portmanteau word *dzsavel*. While this is not inconceivable, *dzsavel* and *potyavel* are more likely to have been formed by analogy to the already existing verbs ending in *-avel*. Another, potential source of the segment *-av-* is the Romani first person singular present tense concord marker *-av-* (cf. R. *džav* ‘I go’, *potjinav* ‘I pay’), which is known to perform similar functions in other, similar varieties, such as Basque Romani (Bakker 1991, 65), Caló (Bakker 1995, 131) or Traveller French (Nahon 2024, 64).

Another derivational suffix that frequently occurs in combination with Romani-derived verbs is a unique variant of the Hungarian denominal verb-forming suffix *-(V)z(ik)*. The vowel component of this suffix, similarly to that of *-(V)l*, can be [o~ε~ø], also in accordance with Hungarian backness and roundness harmony, or [ɔ] after lowering nominal roots. When used on borrowed items, this suffix is only added to borrowed nouns, never to verbs; verbs are interpreted as bound stems and adapted by adding the suffix *-(V)l* (see above) or the invariant suffix *-ál*: E. *manage* > H. *menedzs-el* and not **menedzs-ezik*, E. *install* > H. *installál* and not **install-ozik* (Kiefer & Ladányi 2000, 195; Ladányi 2007, 106).¹⁰

The Romani-derived examples contradict these fundamentals in two respects. On the one hand, *-(V)z(ik)* is regularly used after bound Romani verb stems, although this may be accounted for if we follow the generalisation originally proposed as a universal by Moravcsik (1978, 111–112), namely that verbs are borrowed into recipient languages with nominal status and subsequently verbalised using morphological means available in the recipient language.¹¹ The ERR data contribute an additional example supporting this cross-linguistically common borrowing strategy: Romani verb stems are not borrowed directly as verbs but are adapted, or, more precisely, verbalised, using the suffix *-ázik*, which is associated with denominal verb formation in Hungarian.

On the other hand, the most frequent vowel component, irrespective of the stem vowel, appears to be [a:], e.g. *bes-ázik* < R. *beš-* ‘sit’, *dik-ázik* < R. *dikh-* ‘look, see’, *džsan-ázik* < R. *džan-* ‘know’, *malav-ázik* < R. *malav-* ‘beat, hit’, *paliker-ázik* < R. *paliker-* ‘thank’, *rov-ázik* < R. *rov-* ‘cry’.¹² The use of this suffix may be illustrated by the schema shown in Figure 3.

Some of the literature discussing Romani loanwords borrowed into colloquial Hungarian (Schirm 2006) or Hungarian prison slang (Kis 2014) claims that Romani verbs are adapted using the adaptation marker *-z*, providing examples such as *rovázik* (Schirm 2006, 152) and *csalavázik* (< R. *čalav-* ‘beat’; Kis 2014, 183), but does not comment on the discrepancy between

¹⁰The suffix *-ál*, although not completely unknown within ERR, as seen in examples like *basavál*, *basevál*, *bazsevál* ‘play music’ as well as *kamál* ‘like’, *kajál* ‘eat’, *kokál* ‘lie V’ and *piál* ‘drink V’, is only rarely used in the ethnolect. These items may actually have been borrowed via non-standard varieties of Hungarian after they had been borrowed into Hungarian using the adaptation marker *-ál*.

¹¹In light of numerous counterexamples, this was later reconsidered as a tendency for verbs to be borrowed as non-verbs (i.e. unspecified for part of speech) by Wohlgemuth (2009, 280–284).

¹²Most verbs in ERR have forms both in *-el* and in *-ázik*.

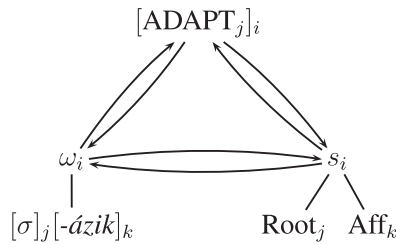


Figure 3. Schema for the suffix -ázik

the form -z and the actual form -ázik. Szabó (2005, 61) also notices the simultaneous existence of two different forms of Romani verbs in Hungarian prison slang, one of which ends in -ik (e.g. *kokavel/kokavázik* ‘lie V’), but she does not delve deeper into the question. We presume that most of these forms have, in fact, been borrowed into various types of Hungarian slang from ERR.

The unexpected vowel component may go back to the Hungarian form -ázik, which only occurs at the end of verbs derived from nouns ending in [ɔ], as a result of regular low vowel lengthening when a suffix is added to the stem (see Siptár & Törkenczy 2000, 170–173), e.g. H. *zongora* ‘piano’ > H. *zongorázik* ‘play the piano’, H. *labda* ‘ball’ > H. *labdázik* ‘play ball’.¹³ A similar process of affix extraction also took place in various South Central Romani varieties, such as Selice Romani; according to Elšík (2006, 35), the suffix -āz- “must have resulted from the re-analysis of morpheme boundaries”: H. *cigaretta* ‘cigarette’ > H. *cigaretta-z-ik* ‘smoke cigarettes’ > R. *cigaret(-)āz-in-* ‘smoke cigarettes’. Elšík (2006, 33) also adds that it “must be followed by the loan-verb adaptation suffix -in-” when used as a denominal suffix. Alternatively, after Hungarian inflectional stems such as *cigaretta-z-* had been borrowed into Romani as *cigaretta-zin-*, the two suffixes were reinterpreted as a complex suffix (as -āz- is never used on its own).

The use of the unusual vowel in the suffix is a violation of the morpho-phonological rules of standard Hungarian. This implies that what has been observed for slang, namely breaking grammatical rules while using familiar language patterns (Roth-Gordon 2021), may be extended to an ethnolinguistic repertoire, and by analogy, most likely to any non-standard language form that employs morphological operations.

Other, unusual patterns include the adaptation of two short Romani verbs, *dža-* ‘go’ and *ha-* ‘eat’ by taking their third person singular forms *džal* and *hal*, and adding the suffix -(V)z(ik), but again, using a non-existing vowel component, long [o:] instead of the expected, short [o], rendering *dzsalózik* and *halózik*. In the case of another three verbs, R. *čōr-* ‘steal’, R. *kūr-* ‘have intercourse’ and R. *vaker-* ‘speak’, the plain stems may also be used as the third person singular form in ERR, without the obligatory adaptation suffix (*csór* ‘steals’, *kúr* ‘has intercourse’, *vaker* ‘speaks’), although these may have been borrowed back via Hungarian slang.

¹³In addition, there are also a few Hungarian verbs which contain the form -áz, as, for instance, *magyaráz* ‘explain’, *vigyáz* ‘be cautious’, *gyaláz* ‘revile’. These were historically derived from a vowel-final stem and -z, which was originally used as a frequentative suffix.

4.2. Nominals

The Romani suffixes *-o(s)*, *-i(s)* and *-a* of Greek origin act as adaptation markers in Romani and originally attach to words borrowed from European languages which then become either masculine nouns ending in *-o(s)* or *-i(s)* or feminine ones ending in *-a*. These suffixes also make an appearance in ERR in the forms *-o*, *-ó*, as well as *-a* (possibly reinforced by the original Romani plural suffix *-a*), and less frequently also *-i*, but they are employed with Romani-origin nouns, irrespective of their original grammatical gender (the suffixes cannot be considered inflectional in ERR as they do not mark gender and number). For instance, we find words like *dajó* < R. *daj* F ‘mother’, *grasztó* < R. *grast* M ‘horse’, *jákó* < R. *jakh* F ‘eye’, or *kéró* < R. *kher* M ‘flat, house’. We also find *danda* alongside *dandó* < R. *dand* M ‘tooth’, *kári* alongside *káró* < R. *kār* M ‘penis’, *kula* alongside *kuló* < R. *khul* M ‘faeces N’, *mindza* alongside *mindzso* < R. *mindž* F ‘vulva’, or *benga* < R. *beng* M ‘devil’. Notably, most of these nouns are also attested in ERR without any such suffix, as in *graszt*, *kul*, *kár*, *mindzs*, or *beng*. As the examples show, these suffixes, which we call pseudo-Romani suffixes, are used with nouns that are originally monosyllabic.¹⁴ Besides serving an indexical function by making the words sound more Romani-like, they also fulfil a pragmatic function, enhancing their recognition and marking them out as part of the special vocabulary of ERR within the Hungarian sentence. Although these suffixes do not mark grammatical categories in ERR, they can be considered morphemes because they follow regular distributional patterns (typically with monosyllabic words) and serve a consistent function (as in-group lexical markers). This pattern is illustrated by the schema in Figure 4; the dashed line means that this function is not compulsorily expressed by the suffixes.

Another pseudo-Romani suffix is *-esz* (or, in some cases, *-sz*), which serves multiple functions in ERR.¹⁵ It goes back to the suffix *-es/-s*, which marks the second person singular present indicative form of verbs in Romani, and is possibly reinforced by another affix of the same form, *-es-*, most likely the Romani oblique singular marker of masculine nouns. In ERR, it primarily derives nouns from verbs, as seen in examples like *csóresz* ‘theft’ < R. *čor-* ‘steal’, *khandesz*

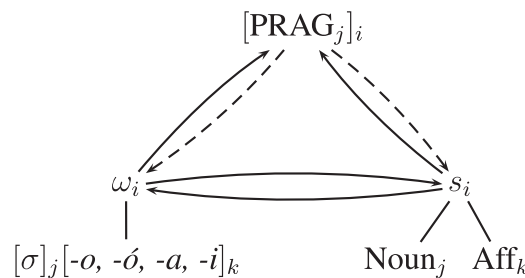


Figure 4. Schema for the pseudo-Romani suffixes *-o*, *-ó*, *-a* and *-i*

¹⁴They can occasionally attach to verbs as well: R. *hal* ‘she/he eats’ > *haló* ‘food’.

¹⁵According to Szabó (2008, 44), there is a remarkably high number of words ending in *-esz* among the Romani-derived items in Hungarian prison slang, a claim which is reiterated by Kis (2014, 184). This is probably due to the fact that they were not created within Hungarian slang, but were, rather, borrowed from ERR.

‘stench N’ < R. *khand-* ‘stink V’ or *szovesz* ‘sleep N’ < R. *sov-* ‘sleep V’, but it can also form adjectives from various parts of speech, including original adjectives, cf. *baresz/báresz* ‘great, cool’ < R. *bar-/bār-* ‘big’ and *kandesz/khandesz* ‘stinky’ < R. *khand-* ‘stink V’. Longer words are often truncated before the addition of the suffix (see Section 4.3 for more details on truncation): R. *bašav-* ‘play music’ > *basesz* ‘music’, R. *džungal-* > *dzsungesz* ‘ugly’. The meaning ‘food’ is expressed by various forms, all of which are derived from the Romani verb *ha-/xa-* ‘eat’ and showcasing the suffix *-esz/-sz*: *hasz* (cf. the second person singular Romani form of the verb, *has*); *haszesz* (which exhibits multiple exponence, in the sense of Harris 2017); as well as *hájesz/kajesz*, from the Romani perfective stems *hāj-/xaj-* (for the use of perfective stems in other ways, see Section 4.1).

As a noun-forming suffix, *-esz* also attaches to various nouns in a diminutive and/or hypocoristic function: R. *kār* ‘penis’ > *káresz*, *gyetra* (of unclear origin) ‘stomach’ > *gyetresz*. This function of a Hungarian *-esz* suffix has been discussed from various aspects (see e.g. Fűköh & Rung 2005 or Somogyi 2017), and its discussion goes back at least almost a century (Juhász 1932). Although the Hungarian suffix has its origins in the now obsolete *-asz/-esz* pair of denominal and deverbal suffixes deriving nouns (Somogyi 2017, 300), Juhász (1932) speculates that its humorous function may have been influenced by Romani words ending in *-es* borrowed into Hungarian student slang. A certain degree of interference between these suffixes is not inconceivable.

In addition to its function as a noun-forming suffix, *-esz* may also be used in certain verb formation processes, notably to mark the third person singular of verbs, as demonstrated by *dzsanesz* ‘knows’ (cf. R. *džanel*) or *rodesz* ‘earns’ (cf. R. *rodel*), and to mark the second person singular imperative, as in *sunesz* ‘pay attention, listen IMP’ (cf. R. *šun* IMP). Figure 5 shows how the various functions of this suffix in ERR can be interpreted as a schema.

These pseudo-Romani suffixes can also be considered examples of affix extraction: the affixes, both derivational (*-o*, *-ó*, *-a*, *-i*) and inflectional (*-es*), were extracted from the heritage language and were then reused. While the role of the derivational affixes is similar to their

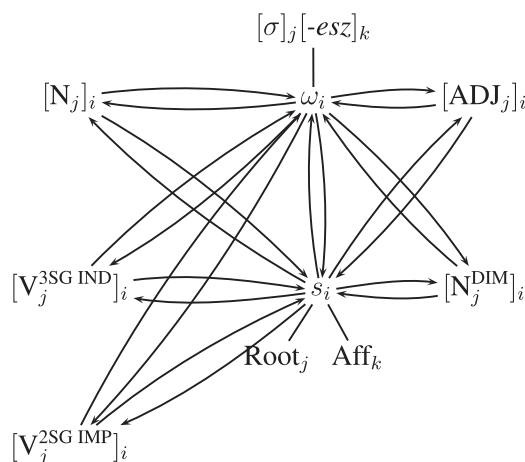


Figure 5. Schema for the pseudo-Romani suffix *-esz*

original function in that they mark out the lexical items which are not part of the matrix language (Hungarian in the case of ERR), the inflectional suffix *-es* is given various new, sometimes quite unexpected functions.

4.3. Clipping

Romani words with three syllables are often shortened to two syllables in ERR. Known as clipping or truncation, it is a common form of word creation (cf. Booij 2005, 20–21, for Hungarian see e.g. Nagy 2007, 317), where the clipped form, while its meaning remains more or less the same, may be marked colloquial or slang, or its meaning may become narrower as part of a different register (Jamet 2009, 19). Clipping has frequently been regarded as marginal (Park 1988, 168). Romani adjectives are particularly prone to clipping while they retain the meaning, and are used as a free variant of the longer form in ERR: *ergya/ergyavo* < R. *erdjavo* ‘bad’, *dzsunga/dzsungalo* < R. *džungalo* ‘ugly’, *zoral/zoralo* < R. *zoralo* ‘strong’, *kasu/kasuk/kasuko* < R. *kašuko* ‘deaf’, *gizda/gizdavo* < R. *gizdavo* ‘proud’.

Clipping may also be accompanied by the addition of a different ending, taken from the pseudo-Romani pool: R. *dilino* ‘crazy’ may become *dili* as well as *dilo* and *dila*, R. *bokhalo* ‘hungry’ may become *bokha* as well as *bokhi* and R. *džungalo* ‘ugly’ may become *dzsungi* alongside *dzsunga*. Sometimes, the long form is not attested in ERR, as in the case of R. *khandino/khandilo* ‘smelly’, but both *kando* and *kandi* exist in ERR.

Other parts of speech occasionally undergo clipping as well: *csumi* ‘kiss N’ < R. *čumidel* ‘kiss V’, *brisi* < R. *brišind* ‘rain’, *singa* < R. *šingālo* ‘policeman’ and *diszku* ‘stupid, foolish’ from *diszkula* ‘fool’ (see Section 5.3). Verbs may also be clipped, followed by the addition of the *-el* marker (see Section 4.1): R. *bašav-* ‘play music’ > ERR **bas-* > ERR *basel*. The imperative form may also be shortened, see ERR *ma vak* ‘don’t talk IMP’ alongside *ma vaker*, and certain strings may be reparsed, such as R. *beš tele* ‘sit down IMP’ > ERR *bestel* ‘sit’ > ERR *lebestel* ‘sit down’, *bestelj le* ‘sit down IMP’, with the addition of the Hungarian verbal particle *le* ‘down’.

4.4. Multi-word expressions

Some, mostly two-word phrases are adopted and used along with their original semantic content: *dzsasz ande* ‘let’s go in’, *kasz kamesz?* ‘who do you love?’, *lácso divesz* ‘good day’, *te merav* lit. ‘may I die’ (an oath), *ko h’ odi ...* ‘who is this ...’, *miro phrál* ‘my brother’, *szo keresz?* ‘how are you?; what are you doing?’, *dik-sun* ‘pay attention IMP’, lit. ‘look-listen IMP’ (also in reverse order: *sun-dik*, lit. ‘listen-look IMP’), or the curses *márola* and *márole* (see also Section 6), virtually functioning as discourse markers. We also find some examples borrowed from Vlax Romani, such as *kamaftu* (< Vlax Romani *kamav tu*) ‘I love you’.

The original structure of some other phrases become opaque and they are not used on their own any more, e.g. *silhi van* ‘it is cold’, which is composed of the original Romani phrase *šil hi* ‘it is cold’ and *van*, the third person singular form of the Hungarian copula, or *mit szokerelnak?* ‘what are they doing?’, which is composed of *mit*, the Hungarian interrogative object pronoun, and the original Romani phrase *so kerel?* ‘what is he/she doing?’, reinterpreted as a single verb and used with a back harmonising Hungarian third person plural suffix. A similar example of Vlax Romani origin is *szoszi van?* ‘what’s up?’, which is composed of the Vlax Romani phrase *so si?* ‘what’s up?’ and Hungarian *van* ‘is’.

5. WORD FORMATION

5.1. Productive Hungarian patterns

Derivational suffixes that are used productively in Hungarian can generally be used productively in the Romani-derived lexicon of ERR as well, but some of them are used in a peculiar manner. Among these is the suffix *-(V)s*, which is used to form adjectives in Hungarian; in ERR, however, its usage is slightly different from standard Hungarian, where it is restricted to nouns, colour terms, a very limited set of adjectives ending in another adjective-forming suffix, *-i*, and a semantically delineated set of present adjectival participles (Kiefer & Ladányi 2000, 183–194). In Hungarian, the suffix *-(V)s* is attached to the adjectival participle, which, in turn, is formed by adding the participial suffix *-ó/-ő* to the verb, yielding form such as *olvasós* (< *olvas* ‘read’ + *-ó* + *-s*), a word describing someone who likes reading, or *pihenős* (< *pihen* ‘rest’ + *-ő* + *-s*), a word describing something used to help one rest. This model appears to be used in ERR as well, but only with the *-ó* allomorph of the suffix, even if it violates vowel harmony (see also Section 3.2), and even if an actual participial form is not attested, e.g. *haszel-ó-s* ‘hungry’ (< *haszel* ‘eats’), *piel-ó-s* ‘boozy, sottish’ (< *piel* ‘drinks’), *kamel-ó-s* ‘in love’ (< *kamel* ‘loves’), sometimes rendering a non-transparent meaning, as in *szinyel-ó-s* ‘impish’ (< *szinyel* ‘is’). Another, somewhat unusual strategy is the addition of the suffix *-(V)s* to a Romani adjective which also exists in ERR in its base form; for example, we find *bokhalós* alongside *bokhaló* (< R. *bokhalo*), both meaning ‘hungry’; *dilinós* alongside *dilinó* (< R. *dilino*), both meaning ‘stupid’ or *sukaros* alongside *sukár* (< R. *šukār*), both meaning ‘pretty, handsome’. This strategy is similar to the one Varga (2020, 44–45) reports in contemporary Hungarian slang, namely that *-(V)s* is attached to borrowed adjectives as an additional suffix emphasising their adjectival nature, as in E. *cool* > H. *kúl/kúlos* or E. *light* > H. *lájtlájtos*; a Romani-derived example is quoted as well: R. *raj* ‘lord’ > H. *raj/rajos* ‘cool’ (see also Section 8).

A suffix which is, according to the best of our knowledge, exclusively used in the ERR of Szolnok and not in any other variety of Hungarian takes the form *-eckí* and is used in a diminutive and/or hypocoristic function. The suffix may have its origins in a nonsense word used in nursery rhymes (cf. Kelemen 1937, 25; Matijevics 1976, 233), and the most prominent examples are taboo words which are toned down by the suffix: *bul* ‘arse’ > *buleckí*, *kár* ‘penis’ > *káreckí*. Alternatively, it may derive from the Slavic adjective-forming suffix *-ski* (cf. Serbo-Croatian *-ski*, Polish *-ski*, Slovak *-ský*, Russian *-ский*; see also its ironic use in contemporary Hungarian: *ruszki*), which is typically used to form relational adjectives, especially from proper nouns and place names. Some of these adjectives are also frequently used as surnames (cf. also the Hungarian surnames Bukovszki, Jeszenszki, Bereczki).

In Hungarian, the suffix *-ista*, of Latin origin, besides being present in internationally used words that are similar in form (e.g. H. *marxista* ‘Marxist’, *ateista* ‘atheist’, *buddhista* ‘Buddhist’, *kapitalista* ‘capitalist’, etc.), usually attaches to nouns productively: H. *iroda* ‘office’ > *irodista* ‘clerk’, H. *Csurka* (István, far right politician) > *csurkista* ‘a follower of István Csurka’. In ERR, the suffix may also be added to verb stems: R. (possibly from Sinti Romani) *bašev-* ‘play music’ > ERR *basevista* ‘musician’, R. *džan-* ‘know’ > ERR *džsanista* ‘past master, expert’.

Other irregular derivations are *morekám* (< R. *more*, a greeting) and *mamakám* (< H. *mama* ‘mum’), which contain the Hungarian diminutive suffix *-ka* and the Hungarian first-person singular possessive suffix *-m*. Their irregularity lies in the fact that the diminutive suffix *-ka*

cannot occur after stems ending in [ɔ] and [ɛ] (they take the alternative *-cska* suffix), and even if it could, it would undergo low vowel lengthening (cf. Kiefer & Ladányi 2000, 168–170).

Plain nominal compounding is rare in Romani (Matras 2002, 76) but common in Hungarian (Kiefer 2000, 529–536). ERR also makes use of plain nominal compounding, as can be seen in the example *gádzsórányi* (*gádzsó* ‘non-Romani person’ + *rányi* ‘lady’). Hungarian and Romani-derived elements can be combined freely: *gádzsólány* (*gádzsó* ‘non-Romani person’ + H. *lány* ‘girl’), *manustánc* (*manus* ‘man’ + H. *tánc* ‘dance’). Loanblends or partial calques also exist: *sünbáló* (based on H. *sündisznó*, lit. ‘hedgehog pig’, < H. *sün* ‘hedgehog’ + *báló* ‘pig’), *vasvaszt* (based on H. *vaskéz* ‘iron hand’, < H. *vas* ‘iron’ + *vaszt* ‘hand’). Compounding in ERR sometimes involves the use of the word *manus* ‘man’ in compounds such as *górémánus* (*góré* ‘boss’ + *manus* ‘man’) or *pékmanus* (H. *pék* ‘baker’ + *manus* ‘man’). While, broadly speaking, compounding is modelled on Hungarian, the latter kind actually distinguishes ERR from standard Hungarian, because compounds like **pékember* lit. ‘baker man’ or **főnökférfi* lit. ‘boss man’ would be ungrammatical in Hungarian, as *pék* and *főnök* already contain the semantic features human and male.

5.2. Romani remnants

Our data suggest that derivational suffixes of Romani origin are not productively used in ERR, at least not in the same grammatical categories as they were in the source Romani dialect. For instance, the use of the *-al/-ál-* suffix, originally a derivational marker deriving adjectives, appears in unexpected contexts in the ERR of Szeged, like in *bogyáló* ‘smart’ < R. *gōdj-* ‘brain’ (cf. R. *godjaver*), *dilaló* ‘stupid’ < *dil-* (a truncated stem, see also Section 4.3, and cf. R. *dilino*), or *sérgyaló* ‘hat’ < R. *šēro* ‘head’. This may indicate some degree of productivity or, alternatively, could result from the analogical formation of new forms based on other borrowed forms containing the same suffix, such as ERR *bokhaló* ‘hungry’ or *dzsungaló* ‘ugly’. Analogy also seems to have played a role in the formation of *báriszti* ‘braggart’ from *báro* ‘great, big’, modelled on ERR *habiszti*, a term expressing disbelief or referring to a pompous person, which is a Greek loanword that does not originally contain an *-iszti* suffix.

Further suffixes appear as essentially fossilised remnants of the heritage language, such as the privative prefix *bi-* in *biboldó* ‘Jew’ (lit. ‘un-baptised’) and *bibaszt* ‘misfortune’ (lit. ‘un-luck’). The adverbial suffix *-e* is found in *csácse* ‘really’ and *polóke* ‘slowly, quietly’, while the agentive suffix *-ár-* is present in *lavutár(i)* ‘violinist’ and *lubár* ‘prostitute’. Such markers are often documented among speakers who, alongside using ERR, clearly possess some knowledge of Romani. For instance, the storyteller in Bartos (1958) uses the derivational suffix *-ipe*, forming abstract nouns such as *bokhalipe* ‘hunger’, and the diminutive suffix *-or/-ór-* in *csajóri* ‘little girl’, *dadoró* ‘daddy’, or *Delóro* ‘God (endearment)’. Nevertheless, these forms are limited to the idiolects of individual speakers and lack widespread use.

5.3. Other processes

We have documented a few seemingly ad hoc formations that arose through wordplay. For instance, there are phrases formed through rhyming reduplication composed solely of Romani-origin words, such as *csalav-malav* ‘severe beating’ from *csalav* and *malav*, both meaning ‘beating’ (see also Section 8), or *kula-bula* ‘arsehole, shithead’ from *kula* ‘faeces N’ and *bula*

‘arse’. Another example based on rhyme involves the combination of a Romani-origin word with a Hungarian one, as seen in *Habiszti Guszti* ‘braggart, loudmouth’, derived from *habiszti* (see Section 5.2), and the Hungarian proper name *Guszti*. Additionally, playful contamination is evident in the term *jagelló* ‘fireman; policeman’, based on *jagaló* ‘policeman’, which resembles the Hungarian term *Jagelló* referring to the Jagellonian dynasty.

Another interesting example is the adjective *diszku* (also *disz*) ‘stupid, foolish’ used in Szolnok, as well as *diszkula* ‘fool’ in Szeged. Historical sources reveal that this term originates from the mocking nickname of a one-legged Romani musician from Szeged who lived in the early twentieth century. According to a newspaper article (Szines tükör 1924), Romani children would frequently mock him while he tried to beg for money. His nickname was *disz-kula-jaj-Pista*. The first two parts of the nickname, *disz-kula*, refer to the D sharp note (H. *disz* ‘D sharp’), which was the only note he could play on the sole remaining string of his violin, while *Kula* (< *kula* ‘faeces N’) was his family nickname. It appears that although he lived in Szeged, his shortened nickname survived and spread more than 100 km away, as it is also used now by the Roma in Szolnok. Today, speakers are unaware of the original meaning or background of this term.

Another means of word formation found exclusively in the ERR variety of Szolnok is the combination of a noun or an adjective of either Romani or Hungarian origin with the third person singular form *kerel* of the Romani verb *ker-* ‘do’. This creates nouns that make the utterance sound “Romani-like”. The use of *kerel* thus serves as a pseudo-Romani feature, employed by speakers to showcase their familiarity with ERR. As one of our consultants explained, “it shows how well we *dzsanel* [know] Romani.” Examples include *buzikerel* ‘gay’ (< H. *buzi* ‘gay’), *gizdakerel* ‘show-off, boastful person’ (< *gizda* < R. *gizdavo* ‘proud’), or *lubakerel* ‘prostitute’ (< *luba* < R. *lubni* ‘prostitute’).

6. RETAINED INFLECTIONAL FEATURES

Gender distinction expressed by the original gender markers (-o for masculine and -i for feminine) is only preserved in a few words where the natural gender is clear, such as in the masculine noun *raklo* ‘non-Romani boy’ and the feminine noun *rakli* ‘non-Romani girl’, although Bartos (1958, 80) already noted that the latter form might also be used to refer to a ‘non-Romani boy’ among Roma living in urban areas. Distal demonstratives in *odá* (masculine) and *odi* (feminine) are preserved and also used as third person singular personal pronouns. As far as adjectives are concerned, they are predominantly adapted in their masculine form, with the ending often lengthened (e.g. R. *baro* ‘big, great M’ > *baró* alongside *baro*), but the feminine form is also sometimes preserved alongside the masculine (*csaladi* ~ *csalado* ‘daft, silly’, *kasuki* ~ *kasukó* ‘deaf’, *lácsi* ~ *lácsó* ‘good’, *puri* ~ *puró* ‘old’). However, the distribution of neither the feminine, nor the masculine form is restricted to the actual gender originally marked by the ending. The gender-specific oblique forms of the third person singular personal pronouns preserved in the fossilised curses *márole* and *márola* (< R. *mār ole* and *mār ola*, lit. ‘he/she/it should be struck’) also lose their gender specificity.

Several nouns are adopted along with their plural endings which then become singular in ERR, e.g. R. *čang* ‘knee’, pl. *čanga* > ERR *csanga* ‘knee’, R. *džuv* ‘louse’, pl. *džuva* > ERR *dzsuva* ‘louse’. Vocative forms are also sometimes adopted and used mostly as nominatives, e.g. Devla ‘God’ (< R. *Dēl* NOM, *Devla* VOC), *csaje* ‘girl’ (< R. *čhaj* NOM, *čhaje* VOC) or *dade* ‘father’

(< R. *dad* NOM, *dade* VOC), also with lengthened vowels (*dadé*, *dádé*), which was used as a generic term to refer to Romani men in Hungarian in the nineteenth century.

The original second person singular imperative form of verbs is often adopted and used actively instead of the Hungarian inflected imperative: *de* ‘give IMP’ < R. *de*, *dik* ‘look IMP’ < R. *dikh*, *sun* ‘listen IMP’ < R. *šun*, *csalav* ‘beat IMP’ < R. *čalav*, *dzsá* ‘go IMP’ < R. *dža*, *ácsi* ‘stop IMP’ < R. *ači*.¹⁶ The Romani imperative forms in ERR can exist alongside the forms inflected according to Hungarian grammar: *dzsajjá* ‘go IMP’ < *dzsal* + *-jál*, *avelj* ‘come IMP’ < *avel* + *-j*, *dikházz* ‘look IMP’ < *dikház* + *-j*, *murdeljál* ‘die IMP’ < *murdel* + *-jál*. Negative imperative forms are also used: *ma phen* ‘don’t say it’, *ma ker* ‘don’t do it’, *ma vak* ‘don’t talk’.

The accusative case is unmarked in Romani on words whose meaning is inanimate, as opposed to Hungarian, where the accusative case is marked without exception. The Romani pronoun *nīšta* ‘nothing’, when borrowed into ERR, retains the unmarked accusative form. It may or may not be accompanied by the Romani negative particle *na*:

- (1) *nista* *na* *dzsanelnak*
 nothing no know.3PL
 ‘They don’t know anything.’
- (2) *a* *muzsikus* *romák* *meg* *nyista* *csórnak*
 the musician Rom.PL and nothing steal.3PL
 ‘And the musician Roma don’t steal anything.’ (Péliné Nyári 1996, 442)

Example (1) corresponds to the compulsory double negative structure found in Romani (*nīšta na džanen* lit. ‘nothing not know.3PL’), and it is also congruous with the obligatory Hungarian double negative pattern: *semmit nem tudnak* lit. ‘nothing.ACC not know.3PL’. Example (2) illustrates the fact that the double negative is not compulsory in ERR. This deviation and the lack of accusative marking may also be viewed as the relaxation of some grammatical rules, similarly to Anglo-Romani (Matras 2010, 26).

7. THE COPULA

The third person singular present tense form of the copula in ERR is uniquely rendered as *szinyel* (with a regional variant *szinyol* attested in Szolnok, and the reduced variant *szil* attested in Szeged), while the corresponding form in South Central Romani is *si* and/or *hi*, derived from the reduced stems *s-* and *h-*, respectively. The ERR form, which inflects for person, number, and tense according to Hungarian grammar (e.g. *szinyelok* ‘be.PRS.1SG’ and *szinyelt* ‘be.PST.3SG’), originates from the long copula stem *sinj-* that is also found in South Central Romani. This stem is predominantly used in the third person past tense, as in forms like *sinja* ‘be.PST.3SG’ and *sine* ‘be.PST.3PL’ in the Romani variety spoken in Csobánka. However, in some South Central Romani varieties, the long stem also appears in the first and second persons in both present and

¹⁶This imperative form, although not typical of present-day Central Romani dialects, has been documented in, for instance, the Romani variety of Ajia Varvara (Iglá 1996, 55).

past tenses, often as a free variant of the short forms, for example, *sinjam* ~ *sam* ‘be.PRS.1PL’ and *sinjamahi* ~ *samahi* ‘be.PST.1PL’ in the Romani variety of Mátraverebély.¹⁷

Considering that ERR prefers polysyllabic words to ensure that Romani-origin words are easily recognisable within a Hungarian sentence (see also Section 4.2), it is not surprising that speakers opted for the adaptation of the long copula stem instead of the more frequently used short stem form in the source language. It was then borrowed into ERR analogously to verbs by combining it with the adaptation suffix *-el* (see also Section 4.1), which is homonymous with the third person singular suffix.

It is worth noting that Bornemisza (1853, 113–114), in his brief grammatical sketch of a now-extinct South Central Romani variety spoken in Pest county, lists the copula form *szinyel* (as well as the stem *szinyäl-* with an open-mid front unrounded vowel) for the second person singular, in place of the original form *szinyal*. However, since *szinyel* is used for the third person singular in ERR, it is more likely that this form represents an internal innovation, as described earlier, rather than a borrowing and reanalysis of the second person singular copula as a third person singular form from a now-extinct Romani variety. Notably, the copula form *szinyel* was attested in all the localities where we collected data. Evidence from two historical sources from the late nineteenth century, one published in Szeged (*Szeged népe* 1881) and the other in Budapest (*Czigányul!* 1888), indicates that this form must have spread quite early. Both sources suggest that the use of *szinyel* by Roma was known by non-Roma as well. The Szeged source includes the copula *szinyel* in a humorous mocking song in the local “Gypsy dialect” sung by non-Roma, while the Budapest source, a political satirical magazine, features the word *szinyel* in a letter that imitates Romani speech in a mocking way.

The short present copula form *hi* ‘is’ has been preserved in the word *silhi* ‘cold’, though it has lost its original meaning (see Section 4.4). Our consultant from Gödöllő was the only one who used the short copula form in its original meaning. For example, the copula retains its original function found in Romani in the phrases *kityi óra hi?* ‘what is the time?’, lit. ‘how many hour is?’ and *kálo hi* ‘he/she is dark-skinned’, lit. ‘dark-skinned is’. The latter example illustrates that the copula may also be used in the third person singular, in accordance with Romani grammar; this is not permitted in Hungarian, where nominal predicates do not require a copula in the third person present tense. We have also documented the use of the long copula form in such structures, as seen in the ERR of Szolnok in the phrase *sukár szinyol* ‘he/she is beautiful’ (cf. R. *šukār sinja* ~ *šukār hi*, lit. ‘beautiful is’ vs. H. *szép*, lit. ‘beautiful’).

The negative copula *náne* ‘there is not, there is no’ is used either in its original meaning, as in the phrase *náne lóve* ‘there is no money’, or as a general negator in the construction *náne volt*, reflecting the Hungarian expression *nem volt* ‘was not’, lit. ‘not was’, as used by Csemer (2001a, 83) in his book. Similarly, *nista/nyista* can convey both meanings (for the use of *nista/nyista* in the meaning of ‘nothing’, see Section 6): it can indicate the non-existence or absence of something (e.g. *nista danda* ‘toothless’, lit. ‘there is no tooth’), and it can also function as a general negator when combined with the Hungarian past copula *volt* ‘was’, as in *lóvé nyista volt* ‘there was no money’, lit. ‘money not was’.

¹⁷The data from Csobánka and Mátraverebély Romani come from Elšík (2008–).

8. SEMANTIC AND FUNCTIONAL CHANGES

Lexical creativity in ERR is evident in the various semantic and functional changes observed. One of the most typical semantic changes result from semantic extension, particularly polysemy. For example, *rányi* has expanded to refer to both ‘wife’ and ‘woman’ in addition to its original meaning ‘lady’. In some cases, the extended meaning does not appear to be conceptually related to the original meaning, as in *dzsukel* ‘dog’, which also carries the meanings ‘cheeky’ and ‘cool’. There are also instances where the original meaning has completely vanished, and the word is now used solely in its new, extended meaning, which often retains some conceptual link. For example, *mórel*, originally meaning ‘rub V’, has evolved to mean ‘have sex’; *péló*, which originally referred to ‘testicle’, now denotes ‘penis’; *cidel* ‘pull V’ has taken on the meaning ‘give a blow job’; and *táto* ‘warm’, influenced by Hungarian *meleg* ‘warm, gay’, has begun to be used to refer to a gay person. As these examples illustrate, the use of such terms may serve, or initially could have served as euphemisms to replace taboo terms. A similar shift of meaning, in this case based on a culturally symbolic association, happens to the Romani-origin adjective *lólo* ‘red’, which, influenced by Hungarian *vörös*, meaning ‘red’ and associated with communism and the labour movement, is used solely with the meaning ‘Russian’ in ERR.

There are also examples of semantic shift where the new meaning bears no conceptual link to the original one. For instance, *nikhaj* (also *nyikhaj*), originally meaning ‘nowhere’, has shifted to mean ‘ne’er-do-well’; the noun *desztó*, which once referred to a ‘handle’, now denotes a ‘policeman’; and *cipi* (< R. *cipa*, pl. *cipi*), originally meaning ‘skin, leather’, now stands for ‘money’.

Another common type of semantic change arises from semantic narrowing, where the range of the meanings of a word becomes more specific, or it is retained only in fixed expressions. Examples include *pas* ‘half’, which appears exclusively in the phrase *pas rom* ‘half Rom’, and *ruppó*, which originally referred to both ‘silver’ and the Hungarian currency, forint, but is only used for ‘coins’ now.

The type of semantic change described by Matras (2010, 110) for Angloromani, where opposite terms can have interchangeable meanings (e.g. *dad* ‘father’ and *dai* ‘mother’ can be used to refer to either parent), is rather rare in ERR. It appears, for instance, in *rakli* (originally meaning ‘young woman’), which, in urban varieties, can also refer to a young man (Bartos 1958, 80). Similarly, the words *csaj* (originally meaning ‘Romani girl’) and *csávó* (‘Romani boy’) now refer to both Romani and non-Romani girls and boys, respectively, which reflects the disappearance of the dichotomous division between Romani and non-Romani ethnic belonging in these terms.

Another pattern of semantic richness can be identified in the use of the word *mangel* in Szolnok Romani. In this variety, *mangel* retains its original meaning of ‘beg’, while also acquiring additional senses like ‘steal’ and ‘hit’. Drawing on the observations of Matras (2010, 111) regarding Angloromani, such multiplicity of meanings reflects the highly context-dependent and presuppositional nature of communication in tight-knit communities. Without the shared background knowledge and understanding among speakers, such expansive linguistic creativity would likely result in misunderstandings.

Functional shift is a linguistic process commonly found in ERR, as well as in other non-standard varieties (e.g. in slang, see Roth-Gordon 2021, 4). This process involves the change of the syntactic function of a word, such as when original Romani nouns can function as verbs in

ERR, or verbs can function as nouns. An example of the former is the newly created verbs *bútyel* ‘work V’ (cf. R. *būti kerel*) and *kulel* ‘defecate V’ (cf. R. *hinel*), which include the adaptation suffix *-el* (see Section 4.1) and derive from the nouns *bútyi* ‘work’ and *kul* ‘faeces N’, respectively. The latter is exemplified by forms resulting from clipping (see Section 4.3), such as the nouns *csumi* ‘kiss’, *basav* ‘music playing’ and *malav* ‘beating’, which originate from the verbs *csumidel* ‘kiss V’, *basavel* ‘play music’ and *malavel* ‘beat’, respectively.

Another common linguistic process found in ERR is conversion (also called zero derivation), which involves the expansion of a word’s syntactic function but without altering its form. This process is typically observed when Romani nouns are also used in their original form as adjectives in ERR. For instance, the Romani nouns *gādžo* ‘non-Romani man/woman’ and *raj* ‘gentleman’ are used as adjectives in ERR in phrases such as *gádžsó nyelv* ‘non-Romani language’ or *raj hely* ‘cool/awesome place’, while the corresponding adjectival forms in Romani would be *gadžikano* and *rajkano*, respectively. These and the earlier examples illustrate the dynamic nature of ERR, where both semantic and functional changes reflect a flexible and creative use of language influenced by Hungarian and Romani, as well as by symbolic associations and the social context.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our paper is the first to discuss, based on empirical data, several linguistic peculiarities in the Ethnolinguistic Repertoire of the Romungros (ERR), a non-standard variety of Hungarian spoken by descendants of South Central Romani speakers. We have examined some typical phonological features, the adaptation and integration strategies applied to Romani-origin roots, the use and function of preserved Romani derivational and inflectional morphology, and the productive Hungarian morphological patterns typical of ERR.

Our analysis has shown that some typical Romani phonemes, particularly the aspirated sounds, have lost their status as distinct phonemes in ERR, surviving only as free variants of their non-aspirated counterparts. Likewise, Romani morphology has largely been lost; the remaining elements are either unproductive, appearing mostly in fossilised forms, or used to mark grammatical categories different from those in the heritage Romani dialect. Examples of the former are the prefix *bi-* attested in fossilised forms like *bibaszt* ‘misfortune’ or the adverbial suffix *-e* attested in *csácsé* ‘really’. Examples of the latter include the indicative present tense third person singular marker *-el*, which is reinterpreted as an adaptation marker in ERR, and the adaptation suffixes *-o*, *-ó*, *-a*, and *-i*, which go back to the Romani markers used to adapt non-Romani nouns, but in ERR, they are exclusively used with Romani-origin words.

Insofar as the use, function and meaning of Romani-origin words are concerned, we can conclude that this repertoire reflects a tendency towards reduced morphological complexity in comparison to Hungarian, alongside an increase in lexical complexity. An example of reduced morphological complexity in ERR is the use of invariant suffixes, such as *-ó-s* (cf. H. *-ó-s* ~ *-ő-s*), *-ázik* (cf. H. *-ozik* ~ *-ezik* ~ *-özik*) or *-el* (cf. H. *-ol* ~ *-el* ~ *-öl*), though this latter form is likely influenced by the homonymous Romani inflectional ending *-el*. Meanwhile, increased lexical complexity is evident in the semantic richness of certain words, such as *rányi* ‘lady’, which has newly acquired meanings, such as ‘wife’ and ‘woman’, or in the multiplicity of unrelated meanings of a single word, as seen in the case of *mangel* ‘beg; steal; hit’ in the Szolnok variety.

Furthermore, the phonology of Hungarian becomes more complex due to the influence of ERR. For instance, we see variation in the vowel quantity of Romani-origin words, as evidenced

in multiple attested forms of ‘great’: *baro*, *baró*, *báro* and *báró* ‘great, big, cool’. Additionally, the introduction of aspirated sounds as free variants through ERR vocabulary adds further complexity to the Hungarian phonological system.

In our paper, we have also touched upon the fact that linguistic creativity is the driving force behind certain innovations found in ERR. Indeed, we can conclude that linguistic creativity plays a central role in the development of ERR, and it is plausible to assume that many other innovative features could also be explored through the lens of linguistic creativity. Linguistic creativity, as defined by Zawada (2006), is a universal and essential human trait, enabling individuals to create and innovate their linguistic resources in various ways and for various motivations. One such motivation is to fulfil social functions, such as the reinforcement of intimacy within a group or the exclusion of those outside it. As Zawada (2006, 241) notes, linguistic creativity is often employed by minority groups to demonstrate their unity by using a variant of the dominant language while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from the mainstream through the use of linguistic innovations.

Similarly, ERR serves as an example of a variety of the dominant language used by a minority group. As discussed, it provides valuable examples of linguistic creativity in the flexibility with which Romani roots are used across different parts of speech and in the various forms of semantic changes they undergo. In addition, the phonological and morphological features of Romani origin can be seen as manifestations of linguistic creativity in ERR, where these features are innovatively reinterpreted or repurposed. The relaxation of certain grammatical rules – in other words, the violation of morpho-phonological and morpho-syntactic rules of standard Hungarian – further exemplifies this creativity. As mentioned earlier in the paper, this aligns ERR with other non-standard varieties, such as slang, where conventional grammatical rules are often challenged. For instance, the lack of backness harmony in the suffixation of ERR, which violates the backness harmony of standard Hungarian, and the optional omission of double negation in ERR, a structure that is obligatory in standard Hungarian, are both examples of such innovations. These and other creative deviations not only reflect playful experimentation with the Hungarian language but also function as markers of group identity and belonging.

Following this line of thought, the use of pseudo-Romani features, which we have introduced in the paper, can be seen as a specific manifestation of linguistic creativity within ERR. We have highlighted that these features may serve various purposes. First, they may enhance the “Romani appearance” of the given word in written form, as seen for instance in the use of *cshaje* ‘girl voc’ attested in social media, where an aspirated sound is indeed present in the heritage language but is not pronounced in ERR. Second, they add a “Romani flavour” to the speech, achieved either through explicit phonological marking – such as in *dzsukhel* ‘dog’ in the ERR of Szeged, which includes an aspirated sound absent from the heritage language – or through morphological marking using Romani-origin suffixes like *-esz* and *-kerel*. This kind of “distinct flavour” is also mentioned in relation to the retention of stress on the final vowel in Caló (cf. Bakker 1995, 130; Leigh 1998, 256). Finally, pseudo-Romani adaptation suffixes such as *-o*, *-ó*, *-i*, and *-a* may serve a pragmatic role by facilitating the recognition of monosyllabic Romani-origin words within Hungarian speech.

In conclusion, our analysis highlights that the adaptation and integration patterns, as well as the innovative reinterpretation or use of linguistic features from the heritage language are rooted in linguistic creativity, which has been, and remains, a key factor in shaping ERR. This creativity also serves as a linguistic tool for maintaining and reinforcing group boundaries between the Romungros and others.

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