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## The Turkish Dialects of Muslim Roms (Gypsies) in Bulgaria

HRISTO KYUCHUKOV

AMSTERDAM

### GENERAL DATA ABOUT THE MUSLIM ROMS OF BULGARIA

The Muslim Roms (Gypsies) of Bulgaria number about 400–500 thousand, and live mainly in regions with compact Turkish populations around the towns of Shumen, Varna, Dobrich, Razgrad, Ruse, Khaskovo, Kürdzhali, and Plovdiv. Being Muslims, they observe the holy days of the Muslim religion, e.g. Ramadan and Bayram, as well as customs and rituals like circumcision.

A great many of them are trilingual, speaking Romani, Turkish and Bulgarian; others are bilingual, speaking only a Turkish dialect and Bulgarian. They identify themselves as Roms, but in some towns, e.g. in Plovdiv, Varna, and Ruse, are likely to affiliate themselves with the Turks. Both groups, however, live in Romani districts, usually on the outskirts of the town or village, and lead a settled way of life.

The Turkish dialects spoken by the Muslim Roms in Bulgaria are very close to those spoken by the Turkish population in Turkey. Very often, however, they use Bulgarian or Romani words when they do not know the exact Turkish equivalent. The result is a sort of “interlanguage” of Turkish, Bulgarian and Romani words. The Turkish dialects spoken by the Muslim Roms of Bulgaria date back to 80–100 years ago, as do the dialects of the country’s Turkish population. With no close contacts with Turkey especially during the past 20–25 years, these dialects have not had the opportunity either to develop or to follow modern Turkish linguistic developments. The result is a “Turkish language” used only by the Bulgarian Turks, one different from modern Turkish. It is what we might call an “island language”: the ver-

naclar developed when a particular language breaks away from the "mother language".

#### THE LANGUAGE OF THE TURKISH ROMS OF NORTHEAST BULGARIA

The speech of the Turkish Roms of Northeast Bulgaria falls into two distinct styles.

*Style 1* originates in Turkish folklore (songs, fairy tales and *maane*). The bulk of the lexis consists of archaisms and words and phrases no longer in use in everyday communication. A closer look at the word order of the sentences shows it to be typical of the Turkish language: SOV (subject, object, verb). For example:

*A irince, irince,  
kaşık saldim pırınce,  
bir incecik ter döktüm  
yar koynuma girince.*

The modifications that may occur in the word order are introduced with a view to maintaining the melody and rhythm of the poem.

*Style 2* is the "modern style" used in everyday communication. It, too, is full of archaisms, but the word order is influenced by Bulgarian: SVO (subject, verb, object). For example, we have *Ben gidiğim mektebe* instead of *Ben okula gidiyorum*. "I am going to school."

#### THE LANGUAGE OF THE TURKISH ROMS OF SOUTHERN BULGARIA

We find the same stylistic differentiation here as in the Northeast. Our investigation of the vocabulary of the Muslim Roms living in the villages around Plovdiv shows that here, too, *Style 1* is used in "folklore" (songs, fairy tales, etc.). For example:

*Ayran içtim bakirdan  
bir yar sevdim yakından  
ben sevdim o sevmedi  
Allah gelsin hakından.*

The "modern" *Style 2* is full of words from modern Turkish, with the word order in this case, too, showing evidence of Bulgarian influence. There are a number of words borrowed from Bulgarian. For example, we have *Obaçe benim çok memnun ondan* (with Bulgarian *obaçe* 'but') instead of *Haylya ben ondan çok memnunum*. Another example is *Ben gidiyom kinoya*, instead of *Ben sinemaya gidiyorum*. "I am going to the cinema."

#### CONCLUSIONS

To sum up what has been said so far: Bilingualism or multilingualism is common among the Muslim Roms of Bulgaria, who speak two or more languages. The Turkish dialects they use are nearly identical with the Turkish dialects used by the Turks of Bulgaria. What we have called *Style 1* (the folklore style) is the same in the Northeast as in Southern Bulgaria. The differences are in the second style, the "modern style" used in everyday communication. There are differences on the morphological level: in Northeast Bulgaria, the verbs end in *-iğim*, (*gidiğim*), while in Southern Bulgaria they end in *-yom*, (*gidiyom*). There are further differences on the lexical level: many archaisms are used in everyday communication in Northeast Bulgaria, whereas in Southern Bulgaria, borrowing tends to be from modern Turkish.

The common features of the two dialects are that both employ a number of Bulgarian words when communicating in Turkish, and that structurally, the Turkish sentences have the characteristic Bulgarian SVO word order.