



UNIVERSITY of  
**ULSTER**



Volume 6 : SHELTA -the Secret Language

## Part D

## Table of Contents

- |                                      |  |        |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|
| 1. Editor's note.                    |  | 6D1    |
| 2. Binchy, Alice<br>(September 1983) | "A Linguistic Description of the<br>Speech of Urban Travelling Children"<br>(extract).                   | 6D3    |
| 3. Binchy, Alice<br>(June 1985)      | "Shelta : An Historical and Contemporary<br>Analysis"<br>(extract).                                      | 6D12   |
| 4. Binchy, Alice<br>(April 1986)     | "Methodological Problems in Researching<br>a Secret Language : Shelta Speakers in<br>Dublin and Oxford". | 6D38   |
| 5. Birch, David<br>(1983)            | "Travellers' Cant, Mumpers' Talk and<br>Minklers' Thari".  | 6D59   |
| 6. Clement, David<br>(1981)          | "The Secret Language of the Scottish<br>Travelling People".  | 6D70   |
| 7. Hancock, Ian<br>(1984)            | "Shelta and Polari".   | 6D79   |
| 8. Hancock, Ian<br>(1986)            | "The Cryptolectal Speech of the American<br>Roads : Traveler Cant and American<br>Anglo-Romani".         | 6D94   |
| 9. Meally, Victor (ed)<br>(1968)     | <u>Irish Scripts</u> (extract).  | 6D110  |
| 10. Ed. note<br>(April 1887)         | "India - Gipsy Tongue - Shelta".   | 6D112  |
| 11. Norwood, T W<br>(May 1887)       | "India - Shelta - Gipsy Language".   | 6D113  |
| 12. O'Shaughnessy, Patrick<br>(1978) | "A Glossary of Market-traders' Argot".   | 6D114. |



Editor's note to Volume 6 : SHELTA - the secret language  
Part D

This volume forms part of a resource collection on the Irish Travelling People. The collection and its accompanying teaching kit of photographs, slides and tape are held in the library of the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. In addition to the 12 volumes listed below there are two supplementary collections, the first containing three reports/surveys by the West Midlands Education Authority and the second containing some recent annual reports of councils and committees for Travelling People in Ireland.

- VOLUME 1 : Early History (Parts A-C)
- VOLUME 2 : The Republic of Ireland 1951-81 (Parts A-H)
- VOLUME 3 : Northern Ireland (Parts A-D)
- VOLUME 4 : Britain
- VOLUME 5 : The United States of America
- VOLUME 6 : Shelta, the secret language (Parts A-D)
- VOLUME 7 : Folktales and Folk Music
- VOLUME 8 : Education (Parts A-K)
- VOLUME 9 : Gypsy Site Provision in England and Wales (Parts A-D)
- VOLUME 10 : Table of Contents and Bibliography
- VOLUME 11 : Health and Welfare (Parts A-B)
- VOLUME 12 : Annual Reports (Parts A-C)
- VOLUME 13 : Republic of Ireland 1982-85 (Parts A-B)
- VOLUME 14 : Gypsies and Other Nomadic Groups
- VOLUME 15 : Miscellaneous (Parts A-

Due to the amount of material some volumes have had to be bound in separate sections, eg Volume 6, Part A and Volume 6, Part B. Many of the volumes contain material which has been specially written for the collection. The page numbers in each volume are prefixed by the volume number, hence 5.16 refers to volume 5 page 16 and 12A4 to volume 12 section A page 4. The supplement page numbers are prefixed by the letter 'S' followed by the page number. Any other page number present will relate to the original book or journal from which the material has been reproduced. Where the material consists of an extract or extracts this fact is indicated in the table of contents, eg Maher, Sean (1972) The Road to God Knows Where (extracts pp146-9). Where all or part of an article appeared directly relevant to more than one area of the collection it has been included in each of the volumes concerned.

Part D of Volume 6 contains sixteen items arranged in alphabetical order by author. Included are several of the most recent writings on the subject.

In compiling this and other volumes in the collection thanks are due to many people, to the staff at the University Library, to Margaret Trew for typing and to Carol Blair for checking the page numbering.

University of Ulster

December 1987



## APPENDIX I

TRANSCRIPTS RELATING TO CANT

The following is a transcript of those parts of the Exchange House tapes which concern cant.

Tape 1. (25-1-1983)

Intvr.: Did you ever hear about a language that travellers have, a secret language? Do you know any words? Could you say some of them?

G. : The two of us will say them.

G. & M.: A lackeen, a lackeen is a woman.

M. : A feen is a man.

(T., interrupting: Stall, gi'us a bit o' the inoch.)

M. : A beor, oh I said a beor, didn't I?

Intvr.: No you didn't say beor.

M. : A beor is a woman, isn't it?

Intvr.: Another word for a woman?

M. : Yes, and a gallye is a child.

T. : Ballye m'anoshin, don't crush(?) the feen.

M. : He said that time, he said gallyoon that means ... what's it mean? Child?

- Intrv.: Does it mean child?
- T. : Nn..
- Intrv.: What's it mean?
- T. : Stop, he says - what'd you say, T--?
- T. : 'f you think I'm goin' to keep putting into that chat ..
- (Girls laugh, nervously.)
- T. : Oh, I speak too fast, I know better than that ..
- Intrv.: It doesn't matter if you speak fast - do you know a lot of the language?
- T. : Aye.
- M. : A gruppa is a shop.
- Intrv.: What's money?
- G. & M.: What's money? Grade.
- T. : Who bugged, who took my tin of chat? or durra?
- M. : Larry took it.
- Intrv.: Any other words?
- T. : Bug us, bug us a bit of the durra.
- M. : Durra's bread, and weed is tea.
- Intrv.: And what's bug?

- M. : Bug on, (sest?) bug on means come on.
- Intrv.: Where do you learn the language? Do you talk to other people, and they (kind of) tell you words?
- T. : We're reared up in it.
- M. : Yeah.
- Intrv.: And your parents, and everyone you know, would speak it?
- M. : Mm. like all travellers would, yeah.
- Intrv.: Do they speak it all the time?
- M. : No.
- Intrv.: Only when they're with other people, is it?
- M. : No, we just talk ordinary, like, but we know if they say anything in their language we know what they're saying.
- Intrv.: But if you don't want them to know what you're saying, you speak like that?
- M. : Mm, the travellers will know what we're saying.
- (These questions were badly framed: the They's were confusing, but M. shows she knew who was intended each time.)
- Intrv.: There must be more words, are there words for everything?
- T. : Hm? Aye, there is, but ....

M. : Cullions is spuds.

T. : I'm gonna currib the shade if he ever bugs round my deelya.

Intvr.: (Admiring noises)

(All laugh.)

Intvr.: Could you say that again?

M. : He said he's going to currib the shade if he bugs around him ...

Intvr.: What does that mean?

T. : That means, I'm gonna currib the shade if he ever crisses round my deel, over beegin the poke anoshin.

Intvr.: (More admiring noises) Say something else.

T. : Say something else? There's somebody at the rattler anoshin, go and (fud?) the fine.

Intvr.: What does that mean?

All together: Somebody, there's somebody at the door, go and tell the man.

Intvr.: Say some more.

T. : I'm not even 'posed to be in this kena anoshin.

(All laugh)

G. : Said he's not 'posed to be in ..

T. : No, I'm barred.

Tape 2. (25-1-1983)

M. : Steamer is a fag.

G. : She said to me, make game(?) for a staymer.

M. : That means I axed her for a fag.

(Mt. comes in. After talking to the others for a few moments, she realises the tape recorder (on the table in front of her) is recording and says "Oh, I'm corribed, that isn't on? go 'way" but she is laughing as she says it.)

Tape 3. (2-2-1983)

(When the secret language is mentioned P. says "hally gilly gooly gallya" which is interesting compared to Harper's experience.)

P. : Stall anoshin, bug on cush on .... that means, stall anosha, stop, cush on anosha means bug on, walk on, go on.

Intvr.: So, bug on, that means go on?

P. : Go on, and misley on, that means go on as well.

Intvr.: What's that? Mis...?

P. : Misley on ... that means go on and cush on, that means go on: stall anosha, that means stop; don't bug on; don't run on.

Intvr.: Are there words for most things, I mean, is there a word for table?

P. : Table? Tell you a word for tea, weed, cup of weed, and gullies, gullies is shoes, and eh, cullions, spuds, (last post?).

(Everyone laughs)

Intvr.: What's that?

P. : Old gammy legs.

Intvr.: What's a dog?

P., and others: Comra.

Intvr.: What's a horse?

P. : A horse? a chattel, a chattel, some of the people call a horse.....

Intvr.: And what's a .... steamer? So if you said, could you say, bug me a steamer?

P. : Bug 's a steamer. Bug us a steamer off t'ye. I had to bug it off t'ye.

Tape 4. (9-2-1983)

Intvr.: Do you know any words of the secret language?

M. : The gammon.

Mn. : Oh, did she tell you all o' that?

Intvr.: She told me some of it ....

Mn. : What'd she tell you?

(M. laughs)

Intvr.: Just words for ... give me a cigarette, things like that.

Mn. : Cigarette's not the gammon.

Intvr.: No, I know, but, bug us a steamer ..

Mn. : Steamer. Slag. (He pronounces it as if was an Irish word)

Intvr.: And any other words?

Mn. : Roweltye.

Intvr.: What's that?

Mn. : Milk.

Mn. : Gi'us a sup o' weed.

Intvr.: Tea?

Mn. : Mm, that's right.

Intvr.: And comra, is it, is a dog?

Mn. : Right, and braw, lackeen, a woman. Feen.

Intvr.: That's a man?

Mn. : Subla

Intvr.: Haven't heard that one.

Mn. : That's a young fellow.

Intvr.: And what's a child?

Mn. :

Intvr.: Where does this language come from?

Mn. : Ah, miss, you're askin' me?

Intvr.: Well, where did you learn it?

Mn. : Ah, I learned it off my father.

Intvr.: Well, where do you think it comes from?

Mn. : I just think it comes from the breed.

M. (laughing sardonically): S'right, the bad breed.

Intvr.: Did you ever hear of Shelta?

Mn. : Shelta? Yeah ...

Intvr.: Is that another name for the language?

Mn. : That's another name..

Intvr.: Would you ever talk it all the time?

M. : What's Shelta?

Intvr.: It's another word for gammon.

Mn. : You're stayin' up agin the wall, where no wind can get at you ...

M. : Oh, shelter.

Mn. : Do we use the language all the time? We do not, only half use it. Well, when we're talking to a grade-ogue (he says it as if it's an Irish word) or anything. (laughs).

Intvr.: To a what?

Mn. : A grade-ogue, a guard, we use it sometimes.

Intvr.: Why, so they won't know?

Mn. : Oh, they won't know what we're talking about. We pass out words to one 'other, d'you know that? We talk to one another, like, and the guard wouldn't understand.

Intvr.: But if you were just talking to other travellers, you wouldn't use it?

Mn. : No, they knows it theirselves ... Well, I'll get up now and get a cup of tea..

*This extract is reproduced by permission  
of the author*

SHELTA TODAY

Travellers have existed as an autonomous community for centuries. They have been seen by the settled community as united only by the bond of common occupation, whereas in fact they have been held together by their outcast status, their traditionally nomadic way of life, and their endogamy. But while these are contributing factors to the sense of community among Travellers, the sine qua non for membership of that community is knowledge of Shelta. This has apparently been an enduring bond over the centuries, and even today, when the average urban Traveller may have a vocabulary of less than a hundred words, Shelta is still regarded as the mark of the real Traveller.

Shelta is learned in infancy - one might say as a joint first language. How travelling children learn to keep separate their two vocabularies, which share the same syntactic structure, would make an interesting study, and would appear to be relevant to research on bilingualism.

Some Travellers today suggest that while "Shelta" is the language of the real Traveller, Cant was and is an inferior variety spoken by people on the fringes of Traveller life,

*This report is a summary of the author's findings...*

who did not really belong. If this were true, it would mean that the majority of Travellers today are "hangers-on", and the descendents of hangers-on, since the most common name for the language today in Ireland is Cant. It is not clear whether cant in the Travellers' sense has had any bearing on the secondary or dictionary meaning - whether in fact instead of there having been two separate entities, what we are talking about is the same entity at different stages of development.

It is clear from evidence presented in earlier chapters that Shelta was at some stage a language. How Shelta vocabulary came to be transferred to English, is a question we must attempt to resolve, however tentatively.

George and Sharon Gmelch, writing about the emergence of Travellers as an ethnic group, described how, at some uncertain stage in the past, Travellers gradually differentiated themselves from the settled population. Perhaps the evidence they presented should be looked at in a slightly different light. Supposing that Travellers, as seems quite likely from what we have seen in earlier chapters, have always considered themselves as separate from the settled population, could it not be said that the changes that led the Gmelches to describe them as "gradually differentiating themselves", were in fact changes in the perception of Travellers by settled people? On this

hypothesis, Travellers up to the time of their supposed separation or differentiation were truly a secret people, speaking truly a secret language, looking like Irish people from the outside but have a secret "nationality" of their own, and having more in common with nomadic groups throughout the world than with settled people. It could be argued that it was the change of perception of Travellers by settled people that created the need for a protective language; Shelta lexis was used for this, in an English syntactic structure. Travellers claim that the advantage of Shelta/Gammon/Cant as a disguise code is that outsiders do not realise it is being used against them: so the English structure is an advantage in itself. Shelta, therefore, rather than dying, merely changed its setting. The history of Cant in England in the Middle Ages, as, (it is argued) a reduced form of Shelta used for subterfuge, could be said to have repeated itself in Ireland. Some traces of the real language remain, however, in its usage in domestic and non-confrontational settings, and in the fact that the mark of a real Traveller remains his knowledge of Shelta/Gammon/Cant.

#### Shelta Today

We must now examine the changes that have taken place in Shelta since it was last studied, by MacAlister; at what the present vocabulary tells about the Travellers' social

system; at Travellers' attitudes to their language; and at the prospect of its survival.

Most of the Travellers interviewed had a basic Shelta vocabulary of between one and two hundred words. There are undoubtedly people with vastly richer stores of words, and there are people who would only know a handful of words. The vocabulary present below includes the words in commonest use. Since Shelta is an unwritten language, one would expect there to be a fair amount of variation in versions of the same word, but even allowing for the passage of time, more variation was found than was expected. For example, chirps and chirks were both given for the word MacAlister gives as t'ux "clothes"; MacAlister's mirsun "shawl" is given as both meersoon and meersoom; MacAlister's kun'el "potato" is invariably cullion; MacAlister's tirpog "a rag" has become trapog; talop "belly" has become tralop; l'esk "(to) tell" has become leisp; nefeis "shame" was in MacAlister's time interchangeable with nefin: this is now invariable neshif; kuldurm "asleep" has become cudlum: this may be the result of interference from English. One Traveller explained this word: "If you have a child and you're trying to get him to sleep, you cuddle'um." One wonders whether these transpositions may not be the result of the continuing Shelta process, at work on itself.

Merril McLane, writing about the survival of a Calo lexicon

among a group of Spanish Gypsies, describes the extension of the meanings of established words: while usually this is for the purpose of enlarging the vocabulary, it functions differently in Calo: "it is a process, perhaps peculiar to dying languages, in which the meaning of existing Calo items are extended to replace ones that have been lost, rather than representing new items or concepts" (1977:306). One type of change is where the original meaning is retained by is extended to include one or more meanings for words which have been lost. This process can also be seen in Shelta: malya "hand" > arm, wrist; it has also been extended figuratively - malyad, "arrested"; cora "foot" > leg; reib "straw, grass" > hair; pi "mouth" > face. The word lurc "an eye" was extended to mean a watch; this led to the eclipse of the Shelta word turc "time" - because of the similarity of the words Geig someone the turc, became Geig someone the lurc. Something of the same process can be seen in the words glodax and ladu, given by MacAlister as meaning "dirt, dirty" and "earth, soil", respectively. The two words seem to have been compressed in the modern word lagadi "dirty". One may query interference from the Romani mochadi "dirty, impure".

While in Calo meanings are extended to compensate for a dwindling lexicon, and in Romani words are "incoined" or compounded, in Shelta there are two ways of filling gaps in the lexicon. One is the use of generic terms like inoch,

which can be used as verb or noun. Sentences like inoch  
the inochs, which could mean Hide the stones, or Peel the  
potatoes, depending on the context underline the present-  
time orientation of most Shelta communication: gesture and  
proximity are necessary supplements.

The other way of filling gaps in the lexicon is the  
traditional Shelta process of prefixing. Even quite young  
children are aware, perhaps even subconsciously, of how this  
is done: when asked a Shelta/Cant word they do not know,  
they will quickly make one up - grapple, for apple was  
given by a young child who could not remember the word  
grula (Irish ul + prefix gr-) or the older muggle. (Note  
that the construction is identical, except that an English  
rather than an Irish word is used in this case.) Other  
examples are groilet for toilet, slag for cigarette, (from  
fag + prefix sl-), gredog for guard. This last seemed to be  
a very ad hoc invention, based either on some modification  
of "guard" or on a reworking of the Shelta shade or sedog.  
One older Traveller, when asked if he had ever heard this  
term (gredog) said he had not, but pointed out the  
similarity between the new word and the Shelta for goat,  
grebhog: this explanation, which seems an unlikely one,  
would make the new word analogous to the word pig for police  
in some circles. If Travellers still recognize a Shelta  
word as such, after modifications such as the above, and  
the, perhaps unconscious, transpositions mentioned earlier,

the implications are interesting for the classification of  
the language; this is an area which would profit from  
further investigation.

Anthony Cash (1977:178) himself of Traveller descent, has  
pointed out the range of the vocabulary of Shelta in itself  
indicates the inadequacy of the "secret code" definition.  
He quoted some Shelta/Gammon words which he considered could  
only belong to intimate familial contexts. The vocabulary  
gathered for this study has 31 words under the heading Food  
and Drink; 24 under the Family and Other Persons; 22 under  
Parts of the Body; 14 in Household Items; 12 under Birds  
and Animals; 8 under Clothing; 8 under Trade and Work  
Items; 7 under Money; and 7 under The Camp. While the  
police are well represented, with four or five alternative  
titles, and there are words for stealing, police station and  
prison, these are far outweighed by words which belong to  
the most un-confrontational of contexts. MacLane points  
out that Calo retains words for moral concepts like good,  
truth, lying and shame. While words for truth and lying  
were still extant when MacAlister's words were collected,  
they are no more; but Shelta retains two words for good, one  
in the everyday sense, the other in the sense of holy or  
venerated. The word for shame is retained in Shelta, and  
is very widely known. Calo has 18 words for family members,  
including two words for virgin: Shelta has no word for  
virgin, or bride, and only 11 for family members, and these

not all widely known. But Shelta has two words for promiscuous women: the difference was explained by a Traveller: "Ripiuc is a prostitute; minteil is a whore - one who does it for nothing". That Shelta should now have no words for aunt, uncle, brother, sister, cousin, or daughter (significantly, the word for son is widely known) is difficult to understand in the light of the importance to Traveller life of the extended family, but the fact that Shelta, unlike Romani, does not seem to have any ritualistic function at weddings, wakes and such occasions, may be at least a partial explanation.

#### Shelta Vocabulary and Sentences

Presented below are a vocabulary and sentences collected from the five main informants. The criteria for inclusion have already been mentioned in the Introduction, where the difficulties of orthography have also been discussed.

agetchil = afraid

aid = butter

alamach = milk; gami alamach = buttermilk

anosha = now, at once, there, belonging to there

aswurt = up, above

beor = woman

beeg = steal

binni = little, small, nice, fine

blainog = cow

bleater = sheep

braven = oats, corn

buffer = settled person

bug = (to) get, give, buy, take

buggle, bugail(?) = (to) take, give

burry, buri = good, great, fine

Cam = son

caideog = stone, rock

cena, cinne = house; gritch cena = hospital;

ledi cena = chapel

chat = (any)thing

chelp = cook

chelpin = boiling

cheri = fire

cherpins = fingers

chimis = sticks, trees

chirks, chirps = clothes, bedclothes

claithean = a hedge

cob = cabbage

coinne, conye = excrement

coireog = privates

comra = dog

coras = feet

corries = shoes

corrib = kill, fight, hit  
craidi = (to) stay, lodgings; craidi-in = waiting  
cri = rise, get up  
cripeach = cat, rabbit  
crolus, crolusc = hunger, hungry  
croudeog = hen  
crush = (to) go, in an emergency sense  
cudlum = sleep  
cuinne = priest  
cullions = potatoes  
curry = horse

deis = (exclamation) look out, look at this  
dil (also yil, jeel) = my, your, his/her, their,  
me, you, him/her, them

dolimi = night  
dreeper = bottle  
dura = bread

elim = butter

fe = meat  
feen = man

fecir, ficir = (this word is given as "a sweep" by  
MacAlister: this definition caused great  
amusement. The real, or present meaning was  
difficult to determine exactly, but it has to

do with sexual intercourse).

gallye = a child  
gami = bad, evil, wicked  
gap = kiss  
gat, gater = alcoholic drink porter; gat cena = public house  
gatch = poor; gatch cena = poorhouse  
gath = young  
gathera = father  
Galyune = (exclamation) God, Lord  
geig = ask, beg; geiger = beggar  
gestiman = magistrate  
gladar = to cheat  
glazer = window  
glimmer = fire  
gleoch = man; gleoch sudil = gentleman  
gleochin = looking  
glocots = police, guards  
glori = listen  
glorog = ear  
gop (long o) = cold  
gopa (long o) = pocket  
grade, goreid = money  
gradar (long a) = solder  
gredog (long e) = guard, policeman  
grag, greig = a street or town  
grainne = a ring

grainneog = a hedgehog (Irish)  
 grani = to know, understand  
 grascrin = cursing  
 gre = tea  
 grebhog = goat  
 gredan = face  
 grifin = coat  
 grisce = straw  
 grishul = beard  
 gritch = sick; gritch cena = hospital  
 gritchins = onions  
 grockins = stockings  
 groda = soda  
 grojer = soldier  
 gruper = (to) work  
 grucra, grooje = sugar  
 gruinneog = window  
 grula = apple  
 grupa = a shop  
 grutchi = (to) close, shut  
 gushach = small pot, cup, porringer  
 gulimas, gullies = shoes, boots  
 guth = wire  
  
 inoch = (any)thing; generic term used as a verb and noun  
  
 jigger = a door

6D23

jumnick = Sunday  
 kimmis (see chimis) = sticks  
 klisp = to break  
 kradi (see craidi) = stop, stay  
 krishk = old  
  
 labi, lobby = hide  
 ladu = earth, dirt  
 lagun = bucket, can or pot  
 lagadi = dirty  
 laicin = girl  
 laig = (to) lose  
 lampa = a bag  
 lampeid = a blanket  
 laprog = a duck  
 lascan = salt  
 lascun = herring; lascan lascun = salty herring  
 laspurt = bastard  
 lasun gathera, nadherum = grandfather/mother  
 ledi cena = chapel  
 ledog = a lady  
 leisc, leisp = (to) tell  
 li = bed  
 liba = blood  
 lirki = mad, angry  
 loba = word

6D24

lobar = to fight  
lorc = car, two-wheeled wagon  
losped (long a) = married  
lub = a hole  
luban (long a) = tent  
lubar = to hit someone  
lubin (long i) = loaf (of bread)  
lugi-in, lungi-in = crying  
lu-og = meal (wheat, oats etc.)  
lurc = eye; a watch; the time  
lurp = flour  
lush = a drink; porter  
lush = to eat, or drink  
lushed, lushy = drunk

malyas = hands; malyad = taken by the police  
maisin = basin  
maloch = nose  
marach = donkey  
medrin = carrying; beor medrin = a pregnant woman  
mealtog = shirt  
meirigin = box, budget, gladar box  
mersum, miarsuin = shawl  
mideog = a shilling; five mideogs = five pence;  
midil = devil  
milc = a bit, a bite  
minceir = Traveller; minceir's thari = Shelta/Gammon/Cant

minic, munic = name  
minteil = whore  
miscon = breast  
mishur = dresser  
misli = go, walk; misli-in = going  
molly = camping place, camp  
mong = a fool  
muggle = apple  
munkera = the country  
muni, muine = holy, good; muniness = heaven  
muog = pig  
muscog = spoon  
muskers, muscos = police

nadeis = place, camp  
nadherum = mother; lasun nadherum = grandmother  
neaca = a can, e.g. for milking cows  
nefeis, neshif = shame, embarrassment; aneshif = ashamed  
nides = people; nide go burry = fairies  
ni'deis = don't, it's not, no  
nioc = (to) steal; niocin = stealing  
niuc = head; penny: niuc of cob = head of cabbage  
niucle = candle  
niup = urine  
nobra = turf; nobra's thari = Bog-Latin  
nomera = a room  
nuggle = gun

nump, niump = a pound

olimi, dolimi = night, darkness

paveys = Travellers

pek = food

pi = mouth, face

pincin = louse, flea, vermin

plank = (to) hide

rack = comb

ragli = garden; muggle ragli = apple garden = orchard; a farmer

raglum, riglum = iron, hammer

rattler = a train

reib = hay, hair, grass

ribeal = a bottle

riblin = sheet

rille, rillich = mad

ripiuc = prostitute

rispa = trousers

rispin = "piece"

rispun = prison

rodus = door

rog = a four-wheeled wagon

roglin = laughing

rouiltye = milk

rumog = egg

salc = take, arrest

saka = pin

sarc = field

sarrag, sharrock = (police) barracks

scai, scuth = water

scaihop = whiskey

scop = (to) open

scir = (?) holy; beor scir = a nun

scibilin, scibol = barn

scimeis = drunk

scurrier = wheel

searg = red

seders = matches

sedogs = guards

shades = guards

sham = man

shilc = (to) sell

siucan = bacon

siudin = a cake of bread

sluinne = a glass

skafer = silver

skiv = fish

sooner = a dog

spunch = tobacco

sraca = a cake of bread

sread = a spade  
sreata = gate  
srideal = bottle  
srinte = a pint  
srocter = a doctor  
stain = tin  
stall = stop, don't  
staimeirs = papers, summonses  
steamer(s) = a pipe, cigarettes  
strumble = straw  
strumna = piper  
subla, sublich = a boy, young fellow  
suni = look, look at; suni-in = looking  
  
tal gata = ten  
talosc = day  
thari = (to) talk  
tobar = road  
tom = big, fine  
tori = to follow, to come back  
tosarun = half-crown  
tospin, tosped = dying, dead  
tral = tongue; cuinne's tral = Latin  
trollop = belly, stomach  
trapogs = rags  
trip = a sup  
tugs, teaches = clothes

6D29

tur = backside  
washbol = soap  
weed = tea  
whid = talk; stall your whiddin = stop talking  
Shelta/Gammon/Cant  
yourum = milk  
  
Sentences and Phrases in Shelta  
The sublich 's out anosha = the boy's out at the moment  
Stall anosha = stay there  
Galyune, beor anosha, we'll be salc-ed = God, the woman's  
there, we'll be arrested!  
The gleoch anosha = the man belonging to there  
Burra subla that'll bug a milc of fe = good boy that'll get  
a bit of meat  
Bug us a steamer = give me a cigarette  
I bugged them inochs = I bought those things  
The beor never racked her head today = The woman never  
combed her hair today  
Cri and misli = get up and go  
The gleochs are corribin in the greig = the men are fighting  
in the town  
The gallyes are corribin around the gleoch's cinne = the  
children are messing around the man's house

6D30



A lampa for the cullions = a bag for the potatoes  
He'll leisp them when he goes back he got no tea = he'll  
tell them when he goes back he got no tea  
Don't leisp her dil = don't tell her  
You tospin laspurt = you dirty bastard  
Getting losped = getting married  
A losped gleoch = a married man  
The beor is crushin lirki = the woman's in a temper (lit.  
"going mad")  
The feens is lushin their weed = the men are drinking their  
tea  
Lush a muggle = eat an apple  
Luog braven = oatmeal  
Misli down to the nomera and glori is the gallye lungi-in =  
go down to the room and listen (to see) is the child crying  
Geig someone the l urc = ask someone the time  
That's a midil of a laicin = that's a bold girl  
The midil may salc you = the devil may take you  
That the midil may corrib you = that the devil may kill you  
Geig a mealtog at the cinne = ask for a shirt at the house  
A milc o' dura = a bit of bread  
He'll thari about us when he misli-is = he'll talk about us  
when he goes home  
That binni gallye there'll be fluent in minceir's thari by  
the time she's three = that little child there'll be fluent  
in Cant by the time she's three  
Geig them their minic = ask them their name

Galyune sik sudil, I'm aneshif, I'm all lagadi and the nides  
are suni-in at me = God Almighty, I'm embarrassed, I'm all  
dirty and the people are looking at me  
A gami niuc = a dirty head  
The laicin wants to make her niup = the girl wants to  
relieve herself  
Don't salc the nobra when the gleoch is suni-in = don't take  
the turf when the man is looking  
Don't pek fornint the woman = don't eat in front of the  
woman  
Look at the pi of the beor = "that's an ugly mouth"  
Plank the innochs = hid the stones (in this case)  
Geig a rispa = ask for a pair of trousers  
Rille gleoch = mad man  
Rille beor = mad woman  
Crushin rillic = going mad  
Salc in the gallye o' the road, the sedogs are coming = take  
in the child off the road, the police are coming  
You're going to be salc-ed to the sharrock = you're going to  
be taken to the barracks  
The scai is chelped = the water is boiled  
Geig a srideal = ask for a bottle  
He's shilc-ed the lorc and he's the gallye gone to the grupa  
= he's sold the car and sent the child to the shop  
Suni the glochots with the staimeirs in their malyas = look  
at the police with the summonses in their hands  
The talosc is misli-in = the day is going

The beor bugged us a few tugs = the woman gave us a few  
clothes

Make weed for the sublà = make tea for the boy

Stall your whiddin = stop talking Shelta/Gammon/Cant

Suni the binni croudeogs in the chimis = look at the birds  
in the trees

Keep down your chirps near the nides = keep down your clothes  
near the people = be modest

#### Conclusion

Today Shelta is spoken mainly (though not exclusively) in situations of confrontation of danger. The social situation of Travellers obviously has a great deal to do with its survival: as McLane points out, the fact that Calo-speaking Gypsies are moving out of the exclusively Gypsy modes of employment into the open market has hastened the decline of their language (1977:317). Social improvements for Travellers, no less than for Gypsies, can be a threat to the survival of the distinctive features of their way of life. There is a real prospect of Shelta being left behind, as a reminder of the bad old days.

In summary, the situation could well develop in either of two ways:

(i) Under the pressure of prejudice against them from the settled community, Travellers will accept housing and settlement, and try to "pass" into settled society. It is clear that they will be facilitated in this by Government policy. In this event, they may jettison any aspect of their lifestyle which might brand them as Travellers, and Shelta will be abandoned.

(ii) Travellers will accept the improvements in conditions which are offered to them, but under their own terms. That is, they will accept housing, if they can live in groups defined by their family structure. Their children will go to school, but with the awareness that they have a culture which is not that of the majority. Being a Traveller will no longer mean living on the side of the road in squalid conditions but instead, having certain rules about cleanliness, living in extended families and knowing and speaking Shelta. In this event, the language will survive, as an alternative way of speaking which is appropriate to certain situations. These situations will be different to the present ones: the need for a secret code for use among hostile strangers may diminish, and it is possible that Shelta may develop along the lines of Anglo-Romani, used in intimate family contexts as well as on ceremonial and other culturally-significant occasions.

There is some evidence that the second prediction will come

true. Respect for the language appears to be growing. Although their vocabulary and knowledge of Shelta may be limited, all Travellers regard fluency in the language as the mark of a real Traveller, and fluent speakers enjoy higher status and respect - sometimes because, by the nature of things, they tend to be older people - but even among younger people, those who take a special interest in the language are regarded with special favour. There is a tendency for Travellers, as they mature and produce children of their own, to become more firmly rooted in the social system, and more interested in passing on Shelta to their own children. Minceirs Misli, the Travellers Movement (made up of Travellers alone) are making significant progress in the promotion of pride in their own culture and way of life. At the same time, they are trying to encourage an awareness among young people of the value and uniqueness of Shelta. It is too early to speculate with confidence on the success of these efforts, but the indications are good. Obviously, respect for and pride in Shelta is inconsistent with its definition as a secret code for the conduct of antisocial business: efforts will have to be made to fix Shelta firmly in the centre of the Traveller world, to move it from the troubled border line between Travellers and settled people to the mainstream of Traveller life.

*This extract is reproduced by permission  
of an author*

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN RESEARCHING A SECRET LANGUAGE:

SHELTA SPEAKERS IN DUBLIN AND OXFORD

Shelta, or Gammon or Cant, is the traditional secret language of Irish Travelling people, or tinkers. It is of uncertain age: some commentators have put its origin as early as the 11th Century; the consensus of opinion is that it is at least 400 years old. In its simplest form it consists of Irish or English words disguised in fairly consistent ways, such as reversing, prefixing, suffixing or metathesis. While there is some debate about whether it ever had a syntactic structure of its own which has been lost, today it is used in a predominantly English structure, similar to the usage of modern Anglo-Romani.

Shelta and Irish Travellers in general have attracted very little scholarly interest. There was some correspondence on Shelta in the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society in the years immediately following its discovery in 1876, but it was not until 1890, when John Sampson of the University of Liverpool began collecting material for a book on the subject, that it came to be treated seriously. This book was sadly never written, but Sampson's material was used by MacAlister as the basis for the Secret Languages of Ireland, published in 1937. MacAlister did no primary research himself - his book represents a compilation of vocabularies collected by others in Scotland, England, the U.S.A. and

Ireland - the latter being a series of articles on Shelta by Padraig MacGréine published in the Journal of the Irish Folklore Commission. Since MacGréine, there has been virtually no primary research on Shelta in Ireland. Apart from articles by Ian Hancock and Jared Harper there have been only passing references to Shelta in academic journals, generally in the context of its relationship to Anglo-Romani.

Shelta speech is typically very fast and quite indistinct, a fact which contributes to its secrecy, since not only the information to be conveyed has to be kept secret, but the very existence of a secret language. Most Travellers describe the use of English structure as a marked advantage of Shelta, since the English base lulls any suspicions that the listener may have that a secret language is being used against him. Hancock (1986), writing about Travellers' language use in general, has observed that in situations where information needs to be passed on cryptically, only the key words will be changed to minimise likelihood of detection. With Irish Travellers, this strategy has proved so successful that the settled community are largely unaware that the language exists. They attribute their inability to understand Travellers' speech to the "thickness" of their accent.

Travellers are extremely nervous about their language

falling into the wrong hands. Very often one is told that certain words can no longer be used, for example "shade" for a policeman in Dublin, or "feen" for a man in Oxford, because Travellers believe that they are known to the settled community. There is also the ever-present fear that the police themselves have an unhealthy interest in the language. When the Travellers' Movement (Mincéirs Misli) set up their own newspaper in Dublin in 1983, the first edition carried a warning about a particular policeman who was said to be learning Cant with a view to teaching it to his colleagues.

I have been researching the subject of Shelta at postgraduate level for 2½ years now, most of that time in Dublin, and in the past few months in Oxford. Much of the work up to now has been documentary, investigating as far as possible the history of Shelta. This has led me to the preliminary stages of a theory of the influence on English Cant of Shelta, but my main interest is in Shelta today, and my present research aims to determine exactly how it functions in the modern Travelling community, who speaks it, when, and why, how it is transmitted from generation to generation, and how it will fare under the pressure of increasing literacy among Travellers. My initial contacts with Irish Travellers in Oxford have shown a startling similarity between the linguistic conditions there and in Dublin, but this will need more investigation, and deeper

study of the comparative social situations will obviously be necessary, to enable me to set Shelta usage properly in context.

Shelta is most commonly used by Travellers in situations of conflict with settled people. The problems of a settled person trying to research Shelta, therefore, are initially daunting. Most researchers in sociolinguistic topics would aspire to obtaining a sample of fairly natural speech. With Shelta, this would present insuperable problems. Shelta is spoken among Travellers held in police stations, for instance, but it would clearly be unethical to try to observe them, either covertly or overtly, there.

The effects of the observer's paradox are multiplied in the case of Shelta, because one is not just an ordinary observer, but in fact a target object of the secret language. One must therefore depend, to a greater extent than one would wish, on honest and informed subjects, who can describe the situation from the inside. This means, of course, that one is getting an edited and interpreted version, but it seems to me that best results are obtained when the Travellers themselves have ultimate control over how material they consider sensitive is presented to the world.

One cannot specify a priori the ideal people one wants to

interview - perhaps representing a good regional mix, with proportionate urban/rural representation, and a range of age groups. This is because access can be difficult, and the very mention of the word Shelta (or Gammon or Cant) can raise hackles. For example, in the very early stages of my research, I approached a Traveller woman I knew very well. She seemed an ideal subject. She was talkative, intelligent and very willing to reminisce about life on the road forty years ago, when she was a child. But a seemingly casual enquiry as to whether she knew any Cant brought a vehement denial that it existed at all, followed by half a dozen reasons why she would not know it if it did. After this incident, the woman did not reappear for several months; and when she did, the relationship was strained, and any attempts on my part to get her talking (on any subject) were treated with reserve, as if an ulterior motive were suspected. This woman clearly knew Cant, but could see no benefits to herself or Travellers in general in disclosing it to outsiders.

Knowledge of the language, then, while obviously essential, is not as important a qualifying feature as a favourable disposition towards the research. So one is not choosing from the entire pool of Travellers in the country, but from the much smaller pool of people who are willing to talk about the language. The self-selected group I got most of my information in Dublin from were relatively politicised

people who could see the benefits to their community of academic interest in it. One has to begin with people who have positive open attitudes to settled people, while not compromising their Travellers' identity. A major disadvantage of using such informants is the fact that they straddle the border between Travellers and settled people. This means that their habits may not be as traditional as those of less accessible people. But they are generally willing to act as the first link in a network, bringing one deeper into the community. Being vouched for by Travellers obviously means more than being introduced by a social worker, or teacher or priest.

Having gained access to Traveller informants, the problem is how to make them comfortable about disclosing information they have always regarded as secret. Even the Travellers I have mentioned, who can move easily across the border with settled society, who can see the social and political benefits of their culture being documented, are uneasy when it actually comes to the point of what they say being written down. I found that treating Shelta as part of the overall pattern of Traveller culture was by far the best approach. This involved allowing the Travellers to set the agenda for all interviews.

Allowing the Travellers to direct the conversation meant that each person could get on record his or her feelings

about the place of Shelta in Travellers' lives: apart from secrecy, Shelta usage functions as a identification device, to place an individual Traveller on the social hierarchy, and indeed to distinguish the real Travellers. I found very early in my research that when I concentrated on the secrecy aspect of Shelta, I got very poor responses - not surprisingly, Travellers are reluctant to divulge words of their language when the orientation of the investigator towards the secrecy function creates the fear that information will be used against them. Another problem with this approach was, of course, that I was controlling the agenda too much, which emphasised the fact that I belonged to the very group that the language defends against - I might as well have worn a police uniform.

Direct questioning, as Lesley Milroy and others have pointed out, is generally unproductive as an interviewing technique. Milroy has the "clear impression that direct questioning as a means of seeking information is less acceptable in Irish urban communities than in English ones, and less acceptable still in Irish rural communities" (1985 : 61). With Travellers, these difficulties are compounded by the exaggerated social distance between themselves and the sedentary Irish population. When I made it clear that the interviewee's brief was merely to talk about Traveller life, and I refrained from asking questions, I found that people talked quite freely about their secret language. This

type of research is very time-consuming. It can involve sitting in a trailer for an afternoon and only getting 15 minutes of usable tape or sometimes little or nothing. It is a particular type of participant observation: one does not just blend into the wallpaper, but becomes part of the life of the place. It is totally unlike ordinary visiting, where the visitor is the centre of attention for a time at least: the researcher has to manipulate a very delicate balance between personal contact and professional neutrality. Her role is both interviewer and would-be friend, and good judgment is necessary to know when which role is appropriate. It is worth stating that while it might seem that developing a personal relationship with an informant would be useful, it is not as simple as that. Most people speak more freely to those who do not seem to have a special interest in the information that they are receiving.

The use of silence is very important. If one allows the seconds to tick by at the end of an utterance, while in normal conversation this would be bad manners, in this situation it allows the informant to elaborate. In fact, if the informant does not realise that this game is not played by normal rules, he may feel he has to elaborate.

One must control one's natural sympathy if someone points out a feature of Traveller life that may be unfair.

Unfeeling though it seems to say so, one will get more information if one does not react to even traumatic experiences in people's lives. On a human level one should: this is the balance between personal and professional attitudes. On the other hand, if someone picks up a child, for instance, Travellers would take it very badly indeed if anyone present did not say, A fine child, God bless him. This has to be done, although there might seem to be no professional reason to do so.

One must constantly keep in mind that the rules for visiting among Traveller families are quite different from those among settled people. Arrivals and departures appear unmarked by the sometimes rather stilted rituals affecting settled people. The researcher can watch Travellers who drop in to each others' homes, and take her cue from them. A neighbour might come in and sit down for a few minutes, and leave without saying anything beyond hello and goodbye, and sometimes not even those. They just participate in the life of the place for a few minutes. This is a good role model, but not very easy for a settled person to play.

Because of the way Shelta is used (that is, as 'foreign' words in an English syntactical structure) such research as has been done has been largely lexical. In my research I have followed this pattern to some extent, in one-to-one interviews. I have used a mixture of elicitation by word

list, non-directed memory, and finally prompting for words in various categories, Food, Clothing, etc. The interviewer has the Traveller at a disadvantage in a way, in that the secret language is not so very secret after all: it has been documented, and the researcher has had access to these sources. One has primarily to avoid exploiting this advantage, as one could quite easily do by concentrating on the protective aspects of the language, which would leave the Traveller feeling stripped of his cover, and forevermore suspicious and resentful of researchers. Treating the language as just another aspect of Traveller culture seems to ease tensions in this area.

One should not, however, flatter oneself in any way that one is getting a complete picture of Traveller life, including language. At one point in this research a neighbour dropped in on a recording session. He listened for a few minutes and then asked the informant whether he was "telling everything", to which the informant replied, No, we have to keep something for our own culture. This interchange was done so quickly and quietly that it was only noticed when the tape was played back.

As a result of this research, I formed the opinion that use of Shelta develops in two stages: young children acquire Shelta for protective purposes at the same time and in the same way as they do English; and it is only as Travellers

get older and more integrated into their community that the language expands into other contexts. Usually young children and teenagers knew words for money, police, shop, steal, beg, run, and stop; they were less likely to know words like fire, sticks, flour, bacon, etc. They were interviewed in group sessions, which were useful in breaking down inhibitions. In fact, the fewer words people had, and the more reluctant they were to disclose them, the more successful group sessions were. The cumulative effect of other people gave courage to shout out words that participants were not sure of, and the presence of others who did not appear to feel that secrecy was a problem helped remove inhibitions on this score. Group sessions had a very game-like quality, which was in marked contrast to the one-to-one sessions. Another contrast was with regard to intersexual problems. In one-to-one sessions, if I read to a male informant from a list any word pertaining to sex, there was an immediate point-blank denial that such a word existed. In a group session, on the other hand, I was able to capitalise on the bravado and giddiness of young men together. Some of them asked if I knew the meanings of certain common English obscenities: I countered by saying I was sure there were Shelta equivalents. They agreed there were, but were still slightly embarrassed about giving them. They finally agreed when I suggested that they give the Shelta words without English equivalents. These words were then validated from the lists; those that did not

appear were filed for future reference.

These experiences give practical support to Labov's observation that the "natural interaction of peers can overshadow the effects of observation and help us approach the goal of capturing the vernacular of everyday life in which the minimum amount of attention is paid to speech ...." (1972 : 256). Labov points out that, since the vernacular belongs to a group rather than an individual, selecting a group means that usage of the vernacular is monitored, and the combination of several speakers may help make explicit knowledge of the structure of the vernacular which an individual could not: usage will be corrected in group interviews. This point has particular relevance for Shelta speakers, since their explicit knowledge of the structure of Shelta is to some extent occluded by the extraordinary emotional value it has as part of their lives.

One of the problems in researching the language is that there is considerable uncertainty among Travellers regarding the boundaries of Shelta. Since social context plays so vital a role in Shelta it is scarcely surprising that this uncertainty should arise. Hancock (1986) records that:

"It is not uncommon for someone to discover only later that a [Traveller] he has been using is not part of

standard English. One seven-year-old girl recently translated chore the wongur as chore the money, not realising that chore 'steal', was also Romnis ...."

I have noted a similar phenomenon, though in the other direction. A small girl when asked the Cant word for money, offered "few pence".

A recurring problem with unwritten languages is the fact that speakers have a strong, if inarticulate, aversion to their language being written down. The fear among Travellers of their language being taken away from them and put in books is very real. It seems to go deeper than the simple fear that settled people will be able to understand their cryptic utterances, but even this natural fear is very hard to overcome. Perhaps it is a function of Travellers' illiteracy, but it was impossible to make them understand that there are some books (academic books, for instance) which hardly anybody, in terms of the population as a whole, ever reads. They understood the danger of the language dying out, but resisted the idea of books having a function in its preservation, even when reminded that future generations of Travellers will most probably be literate. It would be wrong to characterise their fear of the printed word as wholly superstitious; one has to admire their prescience, because of course documenting their culture will change it. It may mean for instance that the documented

facts will become the standard of behaviour, and that instead of being in its natural state of flux the idea of Traveller culture will become static, and therefore in danger of death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acton & Davies G., (1974) "Educational Policy and Language Use Among English Romanies and Irish Travellers (Tinkers) in England and Wales". In Hancock (ed.) Romani Sociolinguistics. The Hague : Mouton.
- Butler, S.B. (1979) Commentary on MacAlister. Privately circulated essay: Dublin.
- Cleeve, B. (1983) "The Secret Language". Studies (Autumn) 251-263.
- Gmelch, G. (1977) The Irish Tinkers: The Urbanization of an Itinerant People. Menlo Park : Cummings Publishing Company.



Gmelch, S. (1975) Tinkers and Travellers.  
Dublin : O Brien.

Gmelch, G. & S. (1976) "The Emergence of an Ethnic  
Group: The Irish Tinkers".  
Anthropological Quarterly, 49,  
225-38.

-- (1978) "Begging in Dublin: The  
Strategies of a Marginal Urban  
Occupation". Urban Life, 6,  
439-54.

Gmelch, S. & G. (1977) "Ireland's Travelling People:  
A Comprehensive Bibliography".  
Journal of the Gypsy Lore  
Society. 4th series, vol. 1,  
no. 3, 159-169.

Gronfors, M. (1982) "From Scientific Social  
Science to Responsible  
Research: The Lesson for the  
Finnish Gypsies". Acta  
Sociologica (25), 3:249-257.

Hancock, Ian (1974) "Shelta: A Problem of  
Classification". In DeCamp  
and Hancock (eds) Pidgins and  
Creoles: Current Trends and  
Prospects. Washington :  
Georgetown University Press.

-- (1984) "Shelta and Polari". In  
Trudgill (ed.) Language in the  
British Isles. Cambridge :  
Cambridge University Press.

-- (1986) "The Cryptolectal Speech of  
the American Roads: Traveler  
Cant and American  
Angloromani". American  
Speech, vol. 61 : 3.

Harper, Jared (1969) "Irish Traveler Cant: An Historical Structure and Sociolinguistic Study of an Argot". Unpublished MA thesis, University of Georgia.

-- & Hudson, C. "Irish Traveler Cant". Journal of English Linguistics, vol. 15, 78-86.

Labov, William (1972) Language of the Inner City. Oxford : Basil Blackwell.

MacAlister, R.S. (1937) The Secret Languages of Ireland. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

MacGreine, P. (1931) "Irish Tinkers or Travellers". Bealoideas, 3, 170-186.

-- (1932) "Further Notes on Tinkers' Cant". Bealoideas, 3,

MacGreine, P. (1934) "Some Notes on Tinkers and their Cant". Bealoideas, IV. III (Meitheamh) 259-263.

MacMahon, Bryan (1971) "A Portrait of Tinkers". Natural History 80, 10, 24-34, 104-9.

MacRitchie, D. (1889) "Irish Tinkers and their Language". Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, vol. 2, 350-357.

-- (1904) "Shelta: The Cairds' Language". Journal of the Gaelic Society (Inverness) vol. 24, 429-468.

Maher, S. (1972) The Road to God Knows Where. Dublin : The Talbot Press.

Meyer, Kuno (1891) "On the Irish Origin and the Age of Shelta". Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, vol. 2, (1st series) 6, 257-266.

Milroy, Lesley (1985) "Questions and Answers: An Analysis of the Discourse Structure of Interviews". In Perspectives on the English Language in Ireland (Proceedings of the First Symposium on Hiberno-English held at Trinity College Dublin 16-17 September 1985).

Okely, J. (1983) The Traveller - Gypsies. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

(1963) Report on the Itinerant Settlement Commission. Dublin : Government

(1983) Publications.  
Report on the Travelling People Review Body. Dublin : Government Publications.

Rehfishch, F. (ed.) (1975) Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers. London : Academic Press.

Sampson, J. (1891) "Tinkers and their Talk". Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, 11:202-221.

-- (1893) "Shelta or Sheldru". Chambers Encyclopaedia. 9:389.

Weidel, J. & O'Fearthaigh, M. (1976) Irish Tinkers. London : Lattimer.

*This article is reproduced by permission of the author*

## Travellers' Cant, Shelta, Mumpers' Talk and Minklers' Thari

David Birch

6D 59

Some time ago I got into conversation with my brother-in-law whose family (with the exception of his parents who settled in a house early in their married life) are English Gipsies (*Travellers*). They move between a small number of permanent caravan sites set up by local councils, restricting their travelling to the major fairs and race meetings in England. Occasionally they move farther afield for summer seasonal work, but for the most part they remain in North Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and more rarely South Yorkshire. Apart from the fascination with which I listened to tales of travelling life, I was particularly interested in his telling of *travellers' cant*, which, he told me, was used whenever travellers were trading amongst themselves in the presence of "gorgers" (people who live in houses), or trading with gorgers themselves. The aim is simple, of course: to confuse the uninitiated listener, and to couch their trading and culture in a secret code. There is nothing new about this; it has happened and will continue to happen in most groups within society. The degree to which it happens with English (and other) Gipsies is what makes it interesting, as compared, say, to the more limited use of back-slang in the butcher trade (Upton: 1974) and the argot of the market trader (O'Shaughnessy: 1975), and, of course, it is certainly not restricted to English. In an 1894 article in *The Indian Antiquary* Pandit S M Natesa Sastri deals at some length with traders' slang in Southern India, in particular the Tamil traders in Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura and Tinnevely. He opens his article with:

"The traders in Southern India as everywhere, have a custom of talking, when they meet together, in a peculiar language, which has a conventional meaning among themselves, with the object of keeping chance listeners ignorant of their transactions and tricks."

(Sastri: 1894, 49)

In an even earlier article in the 1856 *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Captain Newbold talking about the Gipsies of Egypt says:

"In their ordinary intercourse with the villagers, however, they employ the vulgar Arabic, both in conversation and in their accounts. Their own is used, and cant words employed, for purposes of concealment."

(Newbold: 1856, 291)

Such comments, Arabic aside, could be as easily made about many of the traders at, say, the most recent Appleby Fair, for the secrecy of cant is as true today as it was a hundred or more years ago. And indeed long before. For cant, of any description, is a specialised vocabulary and there is little movement between it and everyday language. Professor Blake in his recent book *Non-Standard Language in English Literature*, talking of fashionable language in relation to the writings of P G Wodehouse has this to say:

"Thieves' cant is a specialised language and not many elements from it enter the everyday language. It differs from the kind of language spoken by Bertie Wooster, because that fashionable language is imitated by some and has a much greater currency. People want to understand it, and more of them are likely to have come across it through their own education. Thieves' cant remains a kind of secret language and its usefulness in literature is therefore very limited."

(Blake: 1981, 180)

This secrecy of course makes life difficult for the researcher, because the effectiveness of the cant is that its use is limited to a select few people. Users are not going to reveal it too easily. Sastri faced the same problem in the 1890s as O'Shaughnessy did in the 1970s. He says:

"With great difficulty I have been able to gather two groups of such conventions, to which I now give publicity in the hope that readers of this *Journal* will produce more. But, at the same time, I must inform them that it is no easy thing to arrive at the true signification of secret trade symbols and words, for once the desire of the enquirer to pry into their meaning becomes clear to a trader friend, that friend becomes cunning and suspicious, and then rarely, if ever, gives the true meaning. It is only by constantly comparing information from different sources that one can hope to meet with success."

(Sastri: 1894, 49)

O'Shaughnessy says much the same thing when he remarks that "Market traders are not usually ready to divulge their language to outsiders, for obvious reasons." (O'Shaughnessy: 1975, 24). Cant, then, of any description is never going to be easy to collect, and so it is with the spirit of recording what you can while you can that I offer a collection of wordlists of different types of cant in this article. That such a collection is a pot-pourri of information gathered from old sources and naive informants will not, I hope, detract from its usefulness. Indeed, such a list of words may be a valuable reference in such controversies as the use of thieves' cant by Shakespeare. Some scholars (Blake: 1981, 82) maintain that though Shakespeare undoubtedly knew some thieves' cant he did not use it in his plays. Others (Musgrove: 1981) not only maintain that he knew cant but that he used it in intricate and complex ways undetected by many if not all editors so far. I do not for the moment expect these lists to resolve such problems, but they should go some way towards helping the work of both folklinguists and literary scholars.

Pandit Sastri records a story about the cant used by the Tamil traders which is well worth repeating as a piece of cant-related folklore. By repeating it here I hope it will underscore the idea of the effectiveness of keeping cant terms secret.

"The trading world of South India has a number of amusing stories of the successful working of their conventions and of the great use they

have been to them. Here is one, which a trader related to me at Conjeeveram.

Ten traders had gone to the town of Arcot from Conjeeveram to sell their goods, and were returning home with their purses full. In those days the path lay through a jungle for a certain part of the way, and, while they were passing through this, they were surprised unawares by three daring ruffians armed with scythes, while the poor traders had not even a stick between them. For trading and manliness, in the opinion of many Hindus, do not go hand in hand, and a trader must always submit to physical force without attempting to resist. True to this theory, our ten friends, as soon as they saw the three thieves, shuddered at their weapons, and, on the first demand, laid their all on the ground.

Had the thieves quietly retired to the woods with the money, this story would have ended here, and there would have been no occasion for the trading world to boast of the usefulness of their conventions. But, unfortunately for the thieves, the matter did not end there, for the ruffians were elated at their easy conquest. They had always met with some show of resistance in their other adventures; but in this case they had only to order, and, to their surprise, found that the traders implicitly obeyed. So they collected the purses together, and, sitting opposite their trophy, asked our trader-friends to stand in a row. Their good dresses were the thieves' next demand. These, too, were given without any objection, excepting a small bit of cloth for each to cover his nakedness; and this was only kept with the due permission of the ruffians, willingly granted, for they contemptuously pitied these poor specimens of the human race with no resistance in them. The ten traders now stood as suppliant beggars, ready to run away as soon as leave might be given. But no leave was given, as the thieves had comfortably taken their seats near the booty and the good clothes, and wanted to have a little more fun.

Said the chief of the three: "Do you fools know how to dance?"

"Yes, your honour," was the reply; for a denial of any kind, the traders thought, would only bring down the scythes on their necks.

"Then let us witness your dance before you go away. Give us all a dance," was the order.

The traders had to obey. One among them was very intelligent, and thought within himself that, as the thieves had won everything without trouble, they would entertain no suspicion of any tricks being played at them. So he commenced a trick, which, if the other traders helped, would work successfully. If not welcome to them, he could easily give it up without any harm to himself or to the others; for none but his own party would understand what he was driving at. Now there must always

10

be a song before a dance, or rather dancing must be accompanied by a song; and so he sang a song to introduce the dance, which was clothed in the language of the traders' convention by way of hint to his companions as to how they were to act.

The song was

Nāmanum puli pēr  
Tālanum tiru pēr  
Sāvana tālanai  
Tiruvāṇa tālan śutta  
Sāvana tālan midī  
Tā tai tōm tadiṅgaṇa!

Which may be freely translated thus:

We are *puli* x,  
They are *tiru* x,  
If on a *śā* x,  
*Tiru* x sits down,  
*Sā* x remains.  
*Tā tai tōm tadiṅgaṇa.*

The hint contained in this song was that they (the traders) were *puli* (ten) in number, that the robbers were only *tiru* (three), that if on each one (*śā*) robber three (*tiru*) traders fell, one (*śā*) of the traders still remained to tie the hands and legs of the surprised robbers. The thieves, secure in their imagined success, thought that the song was merely meant for keeping time to the dance, and suspected no trick. The whole body of traders, however, caught the hint, and separated themselves into groups of three, leaving the business of tying the thieves' hands and legs to the starter of the song. When the thieves were all eyes and ears for the dance, and when *tā tai tōm* was at last significantly pronounced, the traders fell upon the robbers. There was a very severe struggle, no doubt, but three to one is no proportion at all in a free fight without weapons, and the thieves had already laid theirs aside in their elation, and so in the end the traders managed to tie them up, and render them helpless. Then, taking possession of their money and other valuables, the ten traders safely returned to Conjeeveram.

What is it that saved them in this delicate position? Traders' convention, is the only answer of the trading world."

(Sastri: 1894, 51-2)

The point here is that the traders' cant is based on a code whereby all the words they use to represent figures in fact relate to flowers and fruit, so that a conversation (or song) using these words would sound quite innocent to an uninitiated listener. It would be very interesting to know if similar stories exist in English folklore.

11

It is not without significance that I cite an article in *The Indian Antiquary* of 1894, for there were many amateur (and professional) philologists of the nineteenth century who were interested not only in cant but in Gipsy languages proper. English and American scholars were busy looking for the origins of the Gipsy languages they were collecting in England and America, and they were looking, for the most part, to the languages of India. Many of their articles on English Gipsy languages and varieties therefore appear in Orientalist journals, and though it is unlikely that I will run into an English Gipsy on the streets of Singapore, I can have easy access to out-of-the-way journals, and they are, without a doubt, a veritable goldmine of information on English folklinguistics and folklore. In an article in the April 1887 issue of the *Indian Notes and Queries*, for example, the editor gives notice of the researches of an American scholar, C G Leland, on his work with a Celtic variety of an English Gipsy language which he calls *Shelta*. The note cites Leland as saying:

"I doubt if ever I took a walk in London, especially in the slums, without meeting men and women who spoke of 'Shelta'; and I know at this instant of two - I really cannot say promising - little boys who sell groundsel at the Marlborough Road Station who chatter in it fluently." (*I.N.Q.*: 1887, 132)

"Shelta", according to Leland is "... a very singular Celtic language which is peculiar to tinkers, but which is extensively understood and spoken by most of the confirmed tramps and vagabonds. It is not mentioned in the *Slang Dictionary*; the English Dialect Society has ignored it; and thus far I believe that I am the only man who has collected or published a word or a vocabulary of it." (*I.N.Q.*: 1887, 132). Leland gave some of his findings in a paper delivered to the Oriental Congress at Vienna, developed, according to a Mr H T Crofton in the May 1887 issue of the *Indian Notes and Queries* (Crofton: 1887), from *Macmillan's Magazine* (to which I have not had access), and in his book *Gypsies* (Trübner: 1882) which the School of Oriental and African Studies supplied to me in photocopy, from which the following extract is taken:

"One summer day, in the year 1876, I was returning from a long walk in the beautiful country which lies around Bath, when, on the road near the town, I met with a man who had evidently grown up from childhood into middle age as a beggar and a tramp. I have learned by long experience that there is not a so-called 'traveler' of England or of the world, be he beggar, tinker, gypsy or hawker, from whom something cannot be learned, if one only knows how to use the test-glasses and proper reagents. Most inquirers are chiefly interested in the morals - or immorals - of these nomads. My own researches as regards them are chiefly philological. Therefore, after I had invested twopence in his prospective beer, I addressed him in Romany. Of course he knew a little of it; was there ever an old 'traveler' who did not?"

"But we are givin' Romanes up very fast, - all of us is," he remarked. "It

is a gettin' to be too blown. Everybody knows some Romanes now. But there is a jib that ain't blown," he remarked reflectively. "Back slang an' cantin' an' rhyming is grown vulgar, and Italian always was the lowest of the lot; thieves *kennick* is genteel alongside of organ-grinder's lingo, you know. Do you know anythin' of Italian, sir?"

"I can *rakker* it pretty *flick*" (talk it tolerably), was my reply.

"Well I should never a *penned* (thought) sitch a swell gent as you had been down so low in the slums. Now *Romanes* is genteel. I heard there's actilly a book about Romanes to learn it out of. But as for this other jib, its very hard to talk. It is most all Old Irish, and they calls it *Shelter*."

This was all I could learn at that time . . . "

(Leland: 1882, 354-5)

Leland then goes on to say how he and a friend were in Aberystwith a year or so later and they came across a "most miserable figure crouching in a hollow like a little cave" hiding from the rock blasting that was taking place. They got into conversation with him:

"Our new acquaintance was ragged and disreputable. Yet he held in his hand a shilling copy of *Helen's Babies*, in which were pressed some fern leaves.

"What do you do for a living?" I asked.

"*Shelkin gallopas* just now," he replied.

"And what is that?"

"Selling ferns. Don't you understand? That's what we call it in *Minklers Thari*. That's tinkers' language. I thought as you knew Romanes you might understand it. The right name for it is *Shelter* or *Shelta*."

Out came our note-books and pencils. So this was the *Shelter* of which I had heard. He was promptly asked to explain what sort of a language it was.

"Well, gentlemen, you must know that I have no great gift for languages. I never could learn even French properly. I can conjugate the verb *être*, - that is all. I'm an ignorant fellow, and very low. I've been kicked out of the lowest slums in Whitechapel because I was too much of a blackguard for 'em. But I know rhyming slang. Do you know Lord John Russell?"

"Well, I know a little of rhyming, but not that."

"Why, it rhymes to *bustle*."

I see. *Bustle* is to pick pockets."

"Yes, or anything like it, such as ringing the changes."

Here the professor (*Leland's companion*) was 'in his plate'. He knows

perfectly how to ring the changes. It is affected by going into a shop, asking for change for a sovereign, purchasing some trifling article, then, by ostensibly changing your mind as to having the change, so bewilder the shopman as to cheat him out of ten shillings. It is easily done by one who understands it. The professor does not practice this art for the lucre of gain, but he understands it in detail. And of this he gave such proofs to the tramp that the latter was astonished.

"A tinker would like to have a wife who knows as much of that as you do," he remarked. "No woman is fit to be a tinker's wife who can't make ten shillings a day by *glantherin*. *Glantherin* or *glad'herin* is the correct word in Shelter for ringing the changes. As for the language, I believe it's mostly Gaelic, but it's mixed up with Romanes and canting or thieves' lang. Once it was the common language of all the old tinkers. But of late years the old tinkers' families are mostly broken up, and the language is perishing."

(Leland: 1882, 356-7)

Leland then gives a word-list of Shelta obtained from this man, tells of his travels back to America and then gives another list of Shelta collected from a tinker he came across in Philadelphia. These lists are given at the end of this article. They should be used, of course, with all the due caution required of glossaries obtained from naive informants, and, who knows, the enthusiasms of a Victorian philologist.

The *Shelta* about which Leland enthuses is according to Crofton (Crofton: 1887, 151) known to some of the Gypsies of his acquaintance (H T Crofton co-authored with B C Smart *The Dialect of the English Gypsies* (Asher and Co. 1875) and reviewed by G A Grierson as "Gypsies in England and India", *The Indian Antiquary*, January 1887, 35-41), as *Mumpers' talk*; "mumper" being cant for tramp. This is confirmed by a Mr T W Norwood who gives a short word list of "Mumpers' talk" in the May 1887 issue of the *Indian Notes and Queries* (Norwood: 1887). He also suggests that it may be the same as *The Germania*. This is not likely as J C Hotten in *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1860) as cited by Upton: 1974,31, says: "The brigands and more romantic rascals of Spain term their private tongue *Germania* or Robber's Language," but it may be worth investigating further. What I think is quite clear though is that there are a number of different varieties of cant which are probably associated with the different groups of Gypsies. Given that my brother-in-law insisted that English Gypsies were known as *travellers*: Irish Gypsies known as *tinkers* (or their descendants: witness the *tinker villages* around Middlesbrough) and foreign Gypsies known as *Romanies*, and that any of these groups would become very upset at being called by the name of another, it would seem that travellers' cant (used by the English Gipsy) should be seen as distinct from both *Shelta* (Irish Gipsy) and *Romany* (foreign Gipsy), though of course when we see the glossary at the end of this paper, there is obviously a lot of interplay between all three.

A considerable amount of material was, of course, gathered in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries (Robert Greene, *The Art of Conny-Catching*; Thomas Dekker, *The Bellman of London, English Villainies, The Gull's Hornbook*; Thomas Harman, *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors*; Thomas Shadwell, *The Squire of Alsatia*); dictionaries were put together in the late seventeenth and eighteenth (*A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* and *A New Canting Dictionary*) and, of course, considerable work was done in the nineteenth century (J C Hotten, *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words*; B C Smart and H C Crofton, *The Dialect of the English Gypsies*; David Macritchie, *Accounts of the Gypsies of India*, and George Borrow, *Romano-Lavo-Lil: Word Book of the Romany, or English-Gypsy Language*), but the status of cant and Gipsy languages is still not settled in the twentieth century. I do not settle it here, but would suggest that any discussion of it should make an initial distinction between a type of cant which is a non-standard variety of a language (realised as a *register* mainly by relexicalisation) and a type of cant which is an *anti-language*. It has long been recognised that complex societies contain sub-groups and that such groups invariably evolve or create a kind of language which serves to reinforce their identity and to exclude others. (Kress and Hodge: 1979, 70). Such groups can exist in opposition to societies (*anti-societies*) and the language they evolve to protect their identity and to exclude others has been called by M A K Halliday *anti-language*. He defines an anti-language as "... a mode of resistance which may take the form either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction" (Halliday: 1976, 15). This makes clear, I think, that there is quite a considerable difference - linguistically, politically and socially, between a secret vocabulary in a non-standard variety of a language, and in the development of a sub-culture language whose secrecy and deception is anarchical in nature. Both may be linguistic variants of a parent language, but the sociolinguistic status is quite different. Blake makes this point (though not with this in mind) when he says:

"When it occurs cant is particularly associated with thieving... thieves' cant can't help to suggest a separate culture which is in direct opposition to the standard morals of the average citizen. It was also needed for safety, and so its use is often that of the code, to keep outsiders in ignorance."

(Blake: 1981, 18)

Professor Blake is, of course, talking of the use of a particular variety of cant in literature, which does not, by any stretch of the imagination, represent the actual status of cant down the ages, though for their part, many folklinguists and literary scholars act as if it does. The legacy of sixteenth and seventeenth century literary ideas about cant is still with us very firmly today, and notions of "rogues and vagabonds" still accompany discussion of cant (literary or otherwise). The sub-culture which cant represents, represents a threat to "normal" society. A code to keep outsiders in ignorance of a certain culture, of a set of trading transactions, is not necessarily an anti-language. The cant of the English Gipsy or Irish Tinker is, like the back-slang of the Birmingham butcher, or the argot of a Lincolnshire market trader, not necessarily representative of an opposing movement to the

norms of society, morally or politically. Though of course socially (at macro or micro level) it is. The secret code depends for its effectiveness upon the presence of an uninitiated audience; that audience may well have the same moral and political views however. The important point is that an anti-language does not require the presence of the audience at all. For the most part then, the words in the following lists belong to a Gipsy *register* and are used with an English grammatical framework, though, as can be seen from the final list, certain non-English inflectional and derivational morphemes recur.

#### Travellers' Cant

The following terms were given to me by Ernest Warren, market trader of Mansfield, North Nottinghamshire. The spellings are his own:

aki returned  
bar-ridge one pound sterling  
beor woman  
bory big  
budaka shop  
cadey hat  
caleing visiting  
chavee child  
chiv knife  
choby shop  
chockers shoes  
coo'e that  
coring fighting  
cosh stick  
curry horse  
cushy-munyer good/nice  
dick look/see  
divi-radged mentally insane  
dordy an expression of exclamation  
dragmush doctor  
drum road  
dukering fortune telling  
fake obtain  
fams hands  
fazam hair  
fencing selling  
flymm five pounds sterling  
galloway wa horse  
gammy not good  
gav town  
gell go  
gereth money  
glimmer light  
gorgers house dwellers  
gry horse  
half a bull two shillings and sixpence

hatoking selling  
heagent idiot  
jacks water cans  
joge shilling  
juckal dog  
kaningra hare  
ken house  
kite cheque  
lacken girl  
lelled arrested  
luvver money  
mandys mine  
manging talking  
manging shan swearing  
mass meat  
mingra-muskrrer policeman  
missly go  
moore kill  
mort-ratwney lady  
mullerd/mullering died/dying  
mush-rye gentleman  
nash-fake go  
nee jace thar-e-ing don't talk  
noley deaf  
parney water  
peeries-plorts feet  
peeover drink  
pooy-bar two pounds sterling  
puker talking  
pvo field  
puvingras potatoes  
rautee night  
Romany foreign Gipsy  
scold tea  
scran food  
sherdick policeman

sherry go  
shushy/shushes rabbit/rabbits  
sloppy tea  
sobiya boy  
sprat sixpence  
sygh sixpence  
thrummer three pounds sterling  
Tinker Irish Gipsy  
trashed fright

Traveller English Gipsy  
tugs clothes  
tuvely smoke  
vardi caravan  
woodras bed  
wyn penny  
yagging looking  
yocks eyes  
yog fire  
yogger gun

#### Shelta, Mumpers' Talk or Minklers' Thari

The following list is compiled from the following nineteenth century sources: Leland (1882); Crofton (1887) and Norwood (1887). I have alphabetised their original lists and indicate against each entry which source it comes from. Leland obtained his collection from two informants, one an Englishman near Bath (La) and the other an Irish Gipsy in Philadelphia (Lb). Crofton says only that a Gipsy supplied him with his list, saying nothing about the Gipsy, but adding that it was collected in June 1879, I indicate it by (C). Norwood (N) says nothing of his informant, but does say that he collected them when learning Romany in the 1850s.

aidh butter (Lb)  
amoch thing (Lb)  
analken to wash (Lb)  
analt to sweep (Lb)  
'attam church (N)  
'attam-day Sunday (N)  
bar pound (N)  
beor married woman (C)  
bewr woman (La)  
binny small (Lb)  
binny soobli boy (Lb)  
biyeg to steal (La)  
biyeghin stealing (La)  
biyeg th'eemik to steal the thing (La)  
blacky a tin vessel (N)  
bladunk prison (Lb)  
blatchy coal (N)  
blyhunka horse (Lb)  
bog to get (Lb)  
bogh to get (Lb)  
bonar good (C)  
bool/bul a crown (N)  
borers gimlets (La)  
boshtardy a pregnant woman (N)  
brogies breeches (C)  
bug talk (La)  
bulla a letter (Lb)  
cab cabbage (Lb)

cambra dog (Lb)  
carob to cut (Lb)  
chaldrock knife (Lb)  
charshom a crown (La)  
chershom a crown (La)  
cherpin a book (Lb)  
chimmel a stick (Lb)  
chimmes wood/stick (Lb)  
chiv knife (La)  
chlorhin to hear (Lb)  
clishpen to break by letting fall (Lb)  
clisp to fall/let fall (Lb)  
crab-shells shoes (N)  
crack a stick (La)  
crimum sheep (Lb)  
crowder string (Lb)  
cunnels potatoes (Lb)  
dainoch to lose (Lb)  
d'erri bread (Lb)  
dingle fakir a bell hanger (La)  
dinnessy cat (La)  
dunnick/dunny cow (C)  
dunnovans potatoes (La)  
dun'nux cow (N)  
durra/derra bread (La)  
dyukas/jukas Gorgio, gentile - one not of the class (Lb)  
elennoch milk (Lb)

*faiha/feye* meat (Lb)  
*fake* to play (N)  
*fake the boshamingy* to play the fiddle (N)  
*finnis* five pounds sterling (N)  
*foky* people (N)  
*foros fair* (N)  
*garjer* man (C)  
*gatter* rain (N)  
*ges'timer* a magistrate or justice (N)  
*ghesterman (ghesti)* magistrate (La)  
*ghoi* put (Lb)  
*gh'ratha/grata* hat (Lb)  
*gial* yellow/red (Lb)  
*gladder* ring the changes (cheat in change) (La)  
*glantherin (glad'herin)* money (swindling) (La)  
*gloch* master/policeman (C)  
*glorhoch* ear (Lb)  
*goihed* to leave/lay down (Lb)  
*goo-ope, guop* cold (Lb)  
*goppa* furnace/smith (Lb)  
*gorhead/godhed* money (Lb)  
*gorheid* money (Lb)  
*gothlin/goch'thlin* child (La)  
*gotherna/gutema* policeman (Lb)  
*gothni/gachlin* child (Lb)  
*goveli* cow (C)  
*grait* work (N)  
*gragh* hair (Lb)  
*grainyog* window (Lb)  
*grannien* with child (Lb)  
*grannis* know (Lb)  
*grannum* barn (N)  
*granyu* nail (Lb)  
*grascot* waistcoat (Lb)  
*gras* horse (N)  
*grawder* soldier (Lb)  
*griffin/gruffin* coat (Lb)  
*grutchie* dinner (Lb)  
*gruppa* supper (Lb)  
*gullemnocks* shoes (Lb)  
*gushuk* a vessel of any kind (Lb)  
*guth/gut* black (Lb)  
*gyami* bad (Lb)  
*hatch* to remain (N)  
*hatchi kootschi* stop a little longer (N)  
*hearing* ear (C)  
*horer* clock (N)  
*humble-bump* hayrick (N)  
*ishkimmisk* drunk (Lb)  
*jigger* door (N)  
*jill* shut (N)

*jilt the jigger* shut the door (N)  
*jumpers* cranks (a tool) (La)  
*kaime/kyni* ears (Lb)  
*kaldthog* hen (Lb)  
*kallar* a shilling (N)  
*kephyl* horse (N)  
*kessig* mare (N)  
*khadyogs* stones (Lb)  
*khoi* pincers (Lb)  
*kiena* house (Lb)  
*kin* house (C)  
*kitshimer* alehouse (N)  
*klapper* turnpike/gate (C) (N)  
*koggies* turnips (C)  
*kor'heh* box (Lb)  
*koris* feet (Lb)  
*krad'hyi* slow (Lb)  
*kradyin* to stop/stay/sit/lodge/remain (Lb)  
*krees* a saddle (N)  
*kreepoch* cat (Lb)  
*kraker* doctor (N)  
*kuller* a shilling (N)  
*kurrb yer pee* punch your head/face (La)  
*kurru* a quart (N)  
*kutar/kutter* a pound (N)  
*lackan* girl (C)  
*lagprat* fish (N)  
*laprog* goose/duck/bird (Lb)  
*larkin* girl (La)  
*lashool* nice (Lb)  
*leicheen* girl (Lb)  
*lorch* a two wheeled vehicle (Lb)  
*loshun* sweet (Lb)  
*lubran/luber* to hit (Lb)  
*lurk* eye (Lb)  
*Luthrum's gothlin* son of a harlot (La)  
*lychyen* people (Lb)  
*lyesken cherps* telling fortunes (Lb)  
*l'yogh* to lose (Lb)  
*madel* tail (Lb)  
*mahs* sheep (C)  
*mailyas* arms (Lb)  
*mailyen* to feel  
*mal-divvus* Christmas (N)  
*manging* talking (C)  
*matchicove* cat (N)  
*masheen* cat (Lb)  
*max* spirits (La)  
*medthel* black (Lb)  
*meilar* an ass (N)  
*melthog* inner shirt (Lb)

*menoch* nose (Lb)  
*merrick* nose (?) (Lb)  
*midgic* a shilling (La)  
*miesli/misli* to go (Lb)  
*miseli* quick (Lb)  
*mislain* raining (Lb)  
*misli* coming/to come/to send (Lb)  
*misli dainoch* to write a letter (Lb)  
*misli to my beaur* write to my woman (Lb)  
*mush it thom* hit it hard (Lb)  
*mill-togs* shirt (N)  
*mithani/mithni* policeman (La)  
*molson* an ass (N)  
*monkery* country (La)  
*morgeni/moinni* good (Lb)  
*morgenni yook* good man (Lb)  
*mor'ghen* rabbit (N)  
*mort* daughter (N)  
*mumper* tramp (N)  
*munches* tobacco (Lb)  
*muogh* pig (Lb)  
*mush faker* umbrella mender (La)  
*mushgraw* policeman (La)  
*mushro* policeman (N)  
*ne jish* stand back/look at (C)  
*ned asken* lodging (La)  
*needi-mizzler* tramp (La)  
*nehras* bed (C)  
*nglou* nail (Lb)  
*numpa* sovereign/pound (Lb)  
*nyock* head (La) (Lb)  
*nyock* penny (La) (Lb)  
*nyo(d)ghee* pound (La)  
*odd* two (La)  
*ogles* eyes (La)  
*okonneh* priest (Lb)  
*olivers* stockings (N)  
*oura* town (Lb)  
*pani* water (La)  
*pee* face (La)  
*plimmer* stone (N)  
*pokkonus* magistrate/justice (N)  
*poplars* broth (N)  
*prad* horse (N)  
*prat* stop/stay/lodge (La)  
*rauniel/runniel* beer (La)  
*rawg* wagon (Lb)  
*reader* a writ (La)  
*reesbin* prison (La)  
*respes* trousers (Lb)

*respun* to steal (Lb)  
*riaglon* iron (Lb)  
*roglan* a four wheeled vehicle (Lb)  
*rooski* basket (Lb)  
*rom-kain* gentleman's house (N)  
*rum-kin cove* gentleman (fine house man) (Lb)  
*rumog* egg (Lb)  
*sai/sy* sixpence (La)  
*saimi/sonni* see (La)  
*salkaneoch* to taste (Lb)  
*salt* arrested/taken (Lb)  
*schufel finnis* five pound note (N)  
*scri/scree* to write (La)  
*shaidyog* policeman (Lb)  
*sharag* kiss (C)  
*shelkin gallopas* selling ferns (La)  
*shelter/shelta* Tinkers' slang (La)  
*shliema* smoking/pipe (Lb)  
*shoich* water/blood/liquid (Lb)  
*shum* to own (Lb)  
*shushei* rabbit (N)  
*skawfer/skawper* silver (Lb)  
*skoich/skor* button (Lb)  
*skoichen* rain (Lb)  
*shoishopa* whisky (Lb)  
*skipsy* basket (N)  
*skolaia* to write (Lb)  
*skolaiyami* a good scholar (Lb)  
*slang* to put or stay in a field (C)  
*slum* good (C)  
*slum the gorjer 'best'* or cheat the fellow (C)  
*smuggle* anvil (Lb)  
*snips* scissors (Lb)  
*sobli* sir (C)  
*soby* ? (Lb)  
*soobli/soobri* brother, man, friend (La) (Lb) (C)  
*soopen* watch (N)  
*spenton* cream (N)  
*spreddum* butter (N)  
*stall* go, travel (La)  
*stamp-drawers* stocking (Lb)  
*stiff* a warrant (La)  
*stigger* gate (N)  
*straihmed* a year (Lb)  
*strawn* tin (Lb)  
*stardas* hat (Lb)  
*strepuch* a harlot (La)  
*strepuch lusk* a son of a harlot (La)  
*stretcher* a year (N)  
*styemon* rat (Lb)

*sunain* to see (Lb)  
*talosk* weather (Lb)  
*tanyok* halfpenny (Lb)  
*tarryin* rope (Lb)  
*tashi shingomai* to read the newspaper (Lb)  
*wdhi/thedi* coal/fuel (Lb)  
*teil* hat (N)  
*terri* heating iron (Lb)  
*terry/terri* coal/fuel (La) (Lb)  
*thari* talk (La) (Lb)  
*theddy* fire (Lb)  
*th-mddusk* door (Lb)  
*thom* violently (Lb)  
*thomyok* magistrate (Lb)  
*tinglers* onions (C)

*tomgarheid* big money (i.e. gold) (Lb)  
*tomnumpa* banknote (Lb)  
*tompart* a person (N)  
*to my-deal* to me (Lb)  
*torog* tramp (C)  
*tre-moon* three months: a 'drag' (Lb)  
*tre-nyock* threepence (La)  
*triporauniel* a pot of beer (La)  
*troopers* breeches (N)  
*veil* town/village (N)  
*vonger* money (N)  
*wedj* silver (N)  
*yack* watch (La)  
*yewor* clock (N)  
*yiesk* fish (Lb)

Leland (1882) also records the following; he says nothing of where they came from:

*hain/heen* one  
*do* two  
*tri* three  
*ch'air/k'hair* four  
*wood* five  
*she/shay* six  
*schaacht/schack'* seven  
*ocht* eight  
*ayen/nai* nine  
*dy'ai/djai/dai* ten  
*hinniadh* eleven  
*do yed'h* twelve  
*trin yedh* thirteen

*k'hair yedh* fourteen  
*tat 'th chesin ogomsa* that belongs to me  
*grannis to my deal* it belongs to me  
*diok man krady in in this nadas* I am staying here  
*tash emilesh* he is staying here  
*boghin the brass* cooking the food  
*my deal is mislin* I am going  
*the midias of the kiena, don't granny what we're a*  
*tharyin* the people of the house don't know what  
*we're saying*  
*that bhoghd out yer mailya* you let that fall from  
*your hand*

Crofton (1887) includes the following interesting note on Shelta numerals:

"The formation of 'Shelta' by the application of 'back-slang' to Erse is curious:

*do, odd* two (Erse *do*)  
*nai, ayen* nine (Erse, *naoi*)  
*dai* ten (Erse, *deach*)  
*hinniadh* eleven (Erse, *aon-deng*)

This raises a suspicion that the well-known slang adjective *rum* is 'back-slang' for *mor* great. 'Shelta' also comprises 'rhyming slang' or 'head slang'.

*grascot* waistcoat  
*grawder* soldier  
*grupper* supper" (Crofton: 1887, 151)

### A Gipsy-English Index

The following list is extracted from Mrs Grierson, "An English Gipsy Index," *The Indian Antiquary* (January 1886 to February 1887), 14-19, 49-57, 84-116, 113-147, 178-180, 236-239, 277-8, 310-11, 340-342, (1887) 32-35, 69-73.

Mrs Grierson uses the following source books to compile her very extensive glossary:

*Romano Lavo-Lil: Word Book of the Romany, or English-Gypsy Language*, by George Borrow, London: John Murray, 1874.

*Etudes sur les Tchinghianes ou Bohemiens de l'Empire Ottoman*, par Alexandre G Paspati, D. M., Constantinople: Imprimerie Antoine Koromela, 1870.

*Ueber die Mundarten und die Wanderungen der Zigeuner Europa's*. Theil V Märchen und Lieder der Zigeuner der Bukowina. Zweiter Theil. Glossar, von Dr Franz Miklosich. Theile VII, VIII. Vergleichung der Zigeuner-mundart Wien, in Commission bei Karl Gerold's sohn, 1875.

I have extracted the English Gipsy words from her index. Readers interested in French, German, Spanish and Asiatic Gipsy words which number in the hundreds in the complete index should see the original. I reproduce below an alphabetised version (the original alphabetised the English words) and also a "half-Gipsy, half-English rhyme" originally used by Grierson to show the close links with the Indian dialect Bhoj'puri. I omit the Bhoj'puri.

"The Rye he mores adrey the wesh  
 The kaun-engro and chiricle  
 You sovs with Irste 'drey the wesh  
 And rigs for leste the gono.  
 Oprey the rukh adrey the wesh  
 Are chiricle and chiricli  
 Tuley the rukh adrey the wesh  
 Are pirenno and pirenni" (15-16)

This translates as:

"The squire hunts within the wood  
 The hare and the bird  
 You sleep with him within the wood  
 And carries for him the sack.  
 Above the tree within the wood  
 Are male bird and female bird  
 Below the tree within the wood  
 Are lover and lady-love"

I will leave it to the reader to decide whether that is original or whether it is a demonstration of a Victorian philologist's play with a strange vocabulary.

*abri* abroad/outside  
*adrey* into  
*aladge* ashamed  
*aley* down  
*amande* to me  
*anava* to come/to bring  
*andro* in  
*angaria* compulsory labour  
*anglo* before  
*apasavello* I believe  
*apopli* again  
*apre* up  
*aranya* lady  
*artapen* forgiveness/pardon  
*artava/artavellava* to forgive  
*asa* also/likewise  
*asarlas* not at all/in no manner  
*astis* possible  
*atchava* *opre* to keep up  
*atraish* afraid  
*av* come!  
*bal* hair  
*ballivas* bacon  
*balormengro* hairy man  
*bango* left/sinister  
*bar/bax/base* 1 pound sterling  
*bareskey* story  
*barik* breast  
*bas-engro* shepherd  
*bashadi* fiddle  
*bata* bee  
*bau/baw* comrade  
*baul* snail  
*baulo* pig  
*baulie* mas pork  
*bavano* broken winded  
*bavol* air  
*beano* born  
*bebi* aunt  
*beng-bengui* devil  
*bengako-tan* hell  
*bengesko* *potan* sulphur  
*bengeresko* *benglo/banglo* devilish  
*ber-engro* sailor  
*bero* ship  
*bero rukh* most  
*berro* convict ship  
*bersh* year  
*beti* little  
*bikhinava* to sell  
*bikhnipen* sale

*bikunyi* undone/alone  
*binava* to sell  
*bishemi* agree  
*bitchava* to send  
*bitched/bitcheno* sent  
*bloen* sister in adultery  
*bob* bean  
*bokkalo* hungry  
*bokkargueri* shepherdess  
*bokkerengro* shepherd  
*bokkersikoe* of or about a sheep  
*bokht* fortune/luck  
*bokra* sheep  
*bokra-choring* sheep stealing  
*bollava* to baptise  
*bolli-menreskoenaes* after the manner of a Christian  
*bolliiskoedivous* Christmas  
*bonnek* hold!  
*bor* hedge  
*bori* big with child  
*borobeshemeskeguero* judge  
*boro-gav* London  
*bosh* fiddle  
*boshno* cork  
*boshomengro* fiddler  
*boshita* saddle  
*bosno* cock  
*bostaris* bastard  
*bovalo* rich  
*buddikur* shop  
*buddikur divous* shopping day  
*bugnes/bugnior* blisters  
*bugones* pimples  
*bugnes* smallpox  
*bukka* liver complaint  
*bul* posterior  
*buna* good  
*bungskorer* corks  
*bungyorer* corks  
*buroder* more  
*busni/busnior* prickle/prickles  
*bute* much  
*butis* work  
*butyava* to work  
*butying* working  
*chal* lad  
*cham* leather  
*charo* dish  
*charos* heaven  
*charp* plate  
*chavi* girl/daughter

*chavo* child  
*chaw* grass  
*chawhoktamengro* grasshopper  
*chee* none  
*chericle* bird  
*chi* child  
*chi* no  
*chik* dirt/earth  
*chiklo* dirty  
*chinava* to cut  
*chingava* to fight  
*chinga-guero* fighter  
*chingaripen* war  
*chingrin* fighting  
*chini-mengro* axe  
*chimpin* cut  
*chirikleskey tan* birdcage/aviary  
*chivava* to cast  
*chofa* petticoat  
*chok* shoe  
*choka* coat  
*chokomengro* shoemaker  
*chomany* something  
*chong/chongor* knee/knees  
*chor dudi mengri* thieves' lantern  
*chore* thief  
*choredo* poor  
*choveno* poor  
*choviness* poverty  
*chukkal* dog  
*chukni-wast* whiphand  
*chumava* to kiss  
*chumba* hill/bank  
*chun* moon  
*chungarava* to spit  
*churi* knife  
*churi-mengro* cutler, knife-grinder  
*churumengro* swordsman/soldier  
*chute-pavi* cider  
*dand* tooth  
*dandava* to bite  
*daya/dieya* mother/nurse  
*deava* to give  
*delava* to read  
*deliengro* a kicking horse  
*desh* ten  
*desh ta dui* twelve  
*desh ta eft* seventeen  
*desh ta pansch* fifteen  
*desh ta stor* fourteen  
*desh ta yeck* eleven

*deskoe* eighteen  
*develiskoe* divine  
*dieya* mother/nurse  
*dikava* to look  
*dikking hev* window  
*dikhipen* image  
*diklo* sheet/shift/cloth  
*dinneleskoe* foolish  
*dinneleskoeno* like a fool  
*dinnelipenes* follies  
*dinnelo* fool  
*diviou* mad  
*diviou ker* madhouse  
*divous* day  
*divuskoe* daily  
*dori* lace/thread  
*dosch* evil  
*dosta* enough/plenty  
*dou* give!  
*dovodoy* yonder  
*dovodoyiskoeno* in that manner  
*dovor* they/those  
*drab (v)* medicine/poison  
*drab (v)-engro* apothecary/poison-monger  
*drav(b)ava* to poison  
*drey* in  
*drom* road  
*drom-luring* highway robbery  
*dude* moon  
*dude-bar* diamond  
*dudi* star  
*dui* two  
*dui tas* cup and saucer  
*dukava* to bewitch  
*dukkerava* to tell fortunes  
*dukking/dukkipen* fortune telling  
*dum* black  
*dur* for  
*dur-dikki-mengri* telescope  
*durnil* berry  
*durrieskie* *guyi* gooseberry pudding  
*duriya/duya* sea  
*dusta* enough/plenty  
*duvel* god  
*eange* itch  
*ebyok* sea  
*eft* seven  
*eskunjo* pin  
*ever-komi* evermore  
*fakava* to pick pockets  
*fashano* false

*fashano wangustis* false gold rings  
*ferreder* better  
*feter* better  
*figis rukh* fig tree  
*filisen* country seat  
*fino* a fine  
*fordelava* forgive  
*fordias* forgiven  
*foros* a city  
*fuzyanri* fern  
*gad* shirt  
*gareva* to hide  
*gavengro* beadle/citizen/constable  
*gerava* to beware/take care  
*gillie* song  
*giv-engro* farmer  
*giv-engro ker* farmhouse  
*giv-engro-puv* farm  
*gono* bag  
*gorgio* gentile  
*gorgie* female gentile  
*gran wuddur* barn door  
*gran wuddur chiricle* barn door fowl  
*grestur* horse  
*gry* horse  
*gry-choring* horse stealing  
*gry-engro* horse dealer  
*gry-nashing* horse-racing  
*grasnakkur* mare  
*grasni* mare  
*grommena* thunder  
*grubben* thunder  
*gudli cry/shout*  
*gudli* nose  
*gudlo* honey/sugar  
*gudlo-pishen* honeybee  
*gueri* woman  
*guero* man  
*guveni* cow  
*guveni-bugnior* cow pens  
*habben* food  
*hachava* to burn/light a fire  
*hanlo* landlord  
*hatchipen* burning  
*hava* to eat  
*hekta* waste  
*heres* legs  
*hetavava* to plunder  
*hev* hole  
*heviskey* full of holes  
*hin* dirt

*hindity mescre* dirty fellow  
*hoffeno* liar  
*hokhorniemush* policeman  
*hokkana* a lie  
*hokkava* to lie  
*hokta-mengro* liar  
*hoktava* to jump up  
*hor* penny  
*horry* pennies  
*hufa* cap  
*hukni* ringing the changes  
*i* it  
*i* she  
*inna* in  
*iouzia* flower  
*is* if  
*iv* snow  
*iv-engri* snowballs  
*jalava* to go  
*java* wife  
*jib* language  
*jibben* livelihood  
*jibava* to live  
*jinava* to know  
*jinney-mengro* philosopher  
*jinney-mengreskey-rokrapenes* sayings of the wise  
*jobis* oats  
*joddakaye* apron  
*jongarava* to awake  
*ju* louse  
*juckal/juggal* dog  
*jukkaelesti* *kosht* dogwood  
*juvalo* lousy  
*juvior* lice  
*juvli* girl  
*kael/kaes* cheese  
*kaemina-flipen* plague  
*kairava misto* to comfort/cure  
*kairipen* labour  
*kakkaratchi* magpie  
*kalodurri* blackberry  
*kam* sun  
*kamava* to desire  
*kamava/kamellova* to love  
*kama-mesro* lover  
*kambori/kambri* pregnant  
*kanam/kana* now  
*kanior* pease  
*kanni(s)* hen(s)  
*kappi* booty  
*karring* hawking

*kas* hay  
*kas-kairing* hay-making  
*kas-stiggur* haystack  
*katches/katsau* scissors  
*kauenengro* hare  
*kaulo* black  
*kaulogero* negro  
*kaulokori* blackthorn  
*kaulo mengro* blacksmith  
*kauloratti* gypsy blood  
*kaun/kan* ear  
*kaurava* to filch  
*kavakoiskoeno* in this manner  
*kavo* this  
*kayes* silk  
*ke* unto  
*keir* house  
*keir poggering* housebreaking  
*keir-ragli* housemaid  
*kek* no  
*kekduvi* kettle  
*kekduviskey saster* kettle iron  
*kekkeno* none  
*kekkeno mushes* *puv* a common  
*kekkom* no more  
*kekkshti* no use  
*ken* house  
*ken* sun  
*kenyor* ears  
*herava* to do  
*herey* house/home  
*herrimus* deed  
*kettany* together  
*kichema* ale-house  
*kiddava* to pluck  
*kil* butter  
*kilava* to play/dance  
*killimengro* player of an instrument/dancer  
*kinava* aley to ransom  
*kinnipen* a purchase  
*kinnipen divous* Saturday  
*kinjo* tired  
*kisseh/kissi* purse  
*kisi* how much?  
*kistri-mengro* rider  
*kisturava* to ride  
*klism* key  
*klism-hev* keyhole  
*klismengri* lock  
*klop* gate  
*kokalor* bones

*koko* uncle  
*kokoro* alone  
*komi* more  
*komorrus* hall  
*kongri* church  
*kongli* comb  
*koppur* blanket  
*korava* to cry out/to riot  
*koramengro* rioter  
*korau* crown  
*korredo* blind  
*koring* rioting  
*koring lil* hawking licence  
*kora* pitcher  
*koshtipen* goodness  
*krafni* button  
*krafni-mengro* buttonmaker  
*krallis* king  
*krapen* affliction  
*krikni* week  
*krior* pismires  
*krukey* week  
*kuesni* basket  
*kullur* shilling  
*kurapen* beating/fighting  
*kurava* to fight  
*kurlo* neck  
*kurlomengri* pillow  
*kuroboshno* fighting cock  
*kuromengro* fighter/boxer  
*kuttur* piece  
*la* her  
*lachava* to find  
*laki* hers  
*lang* lame  
*lav* word  
*lavengro* linguist  
*lav-chingaripen* a dispute  
*leava* to take  
*lelava kappi* to make a profit  
*lennor* Spring  
*levinor* ale  
*levinor ker* alehouse  
*levinor-engri* hop plant  
*li* it  
*lil* letter/book  
*lillai* Summer  
*linnow* taken/apprehended  
*lollo* farthing  
*lollipaishta* red cloak  
*lollo* red/yellow

lollo-maicha red herring  
 lollo-bengres red waistcoat  
 lubberpen harlotry  
 lubbery harlot  
 lundra London  
 luripen robbery/booty  
 luvo money  
 luvomengroker bank (money)  
 luvomengro moneychanger  
 ma not  
 maas flesh  
 maas-engro butcher  
 macho fish  
 maluno lightning  
 malluko fire  
 man I  
 mangava to beg  
 manga-mengro beggar  
 mangipen begging  
 manrikley cake  
 manush man  
 matcheskoe guero fisherman  
 matchko cat  
 matto intoxicated  
 mattipen drunkenness  
 matto-mengro drunkard  
 mea mile  
 meabar milestone  
 medisin bushel/measure  
 men we  
 men neck  
 menpangushi neckcloth  
 mensalli table  
 mestipen livelihood/fortune/luck  
 mi I  
 millior miles  
 miro mine  
 misto-dusto very well  
 moarava to grind  
 mollaouis pewter  
 morava to share  
 moreno killed  
 moro our  
 morro bread  
 mort concubine  
 mormusti midwife  
 moskey spy  
 mosko fly  
 mufta box  
 muktar chest  
 mulengris grape

mullenimuktar coffin  
 mulleno-ker sepulchre/cemetery  
 mulleno hev grave  
 mullo dead man  
 mulloodustiemukto coffin  
 mumli candle  
 mumlimengro candlestick/chandler  
 mushipen lad  
 muskro constable  
 mutra-mengri tea  
 nalipen sickness/liver complaint  
 naflo sick  
 nangipen nakedness  
 nango naked  
 nashava to lose/hang/destroy  
 nashimescro racer  
 nashimescro-tan racecourse  
 nashko hung  
 nastis impossible  
 nav name  
 naval thread  
 ne no  
 netavava to beat  
 nevo new  
 nogo one's own  
 nok nose  
 nokkipen snuff  
 o he  
 o the  
 odoi there  
 olevas stockings  
 opral above  
 opre above  
 ora hour  
 pa by  
 padlo across  
 pahamengro turnip  
 paillos filberts  
 palal behind/back again/after  
 pali again/back  
 pall brother  
 pall of the bor hedgehog  
 pandi-pen pinfold  
 pandlo imprisoned  
 pandlo-mengro tinker  
 pandlo-mengri tollgate  
 pani-mengro sailor  
 pansh fire  
 panno cloth  
 pannugushi handkerchief  
 pappins ducks

parno white  
 parrava to change  
 pas half  
 pasheno halfpenny  
 patch shameparakrowava to thank  
 pattin leaf  
 paub-tan orchard  
 paub/paubi apple  
 pauno flour  
 pawdel over  
 pawungo watery  
 peava to drink  
 pea-mengro drunkard  
 pedloer nut  
 pek'd roasted  
 pelengro gry stone horse  
 pen sister  
 perava to fall  
 perava ruley to fall down  
 perdo full  
 pesava apopli to repay  
 petul horse shoe  
 petulengro blacksmith  
 piat fun  
 piapen health  
 pija-mengro drunkard  
 pikkis breast  
 piko shoulder  
 pire feet  
 piren sweetheart  
 pirry boiler  
 pishen flea  
 pively-guerie widow  
 pively-guero widower  
 pively-raumie widow-lady  
 pizzarris in debt  
 pizzarrimengro debtor  
 plakta sheet  
 plashta cloak  
 plastra-mengro pursuer  
 plastrava to run  
 poggado broken  
 poggado bavol-engro broken-winded horse  
 poggra-mengro mill  
 poggrava to break  
 pokiniskoe-ker Justice of the Peace's house  
 poknies Justice of the Peace  
 por feather  
 pordo heavy  
 por-engro penmaster  
 por-engri-pen penmanship

possey-mengri pitchfork  
 posh half  
 posh foal  
 pov earth  
 pov-engro potato  
 povu-guero mole  
 prao upper  
 puchava to ask  
 puddava to blow  
 pude-mengri bellows  
 pudge bridge  
 pukkerava to answer  
 pur belly  
 pureno old  
 puro-dad grandfather  
 purrum leek  
 pus straw  
 pushed buried  
 putsi pocket  
 putsi-lil pocketbook  
 puvvesti churi plough  
 racheta goose  
 radiskey nightly  
 ragimas grandeur  
 raia gentleman  
 rakava to beware  
 rakli girl  
 raklo boy  
 ran rod  
 rarde night  
 radiskey hair poggering burglary  
 rashengro clergyman  
 rashi clergyman  
 rashieskey rokkning tan pulpit  
 ratniken chiricle nightingale  
 ratti blood  
 rawnie lady  
 retza ducks  
 riddo dressed  
 rigava in yi to bear in mind  
 riggurava to bear  
 rinkeno handsome  
 rivipen dress/frock  
 rokren-chiricle parrot  
 rokrenengro lawyer  
 rokunyes breeches  
 rom/rommado husband/married  
 romani chi gipsy lass  
 romani chal Romany man  
 romani rye Romany gentleman  
 romipen marriage  
 roshto angry

roujiou clean  
 rukeskey kost branch  
 rup/rupenoe silver  
 ruslo strong  
 sap snake  
 sapnis soap  
 sar as/how  
 sarla evening  
 sasre iron  
 sastres nails  
 sasremengro ironmonger  
 sas netsaulokolomus oath  
 sau kisi how much?  
 se is  
 shabava to cut away  
 shauvava to get with child  
 shello rope  
 sher-engri halter  
 shero head  
 sherengro headman  
 sherraffo converted  
 shesu/shochoi rabbit  
 shillero cold  
 shillipen a cold  
 sho six  
 shok cabbage  
 shubley patties geese  
 shumaben hearing  
 shunava to hear  
 si kovar ajaw so it is  
 sig soon  
 sikovar eternally  
 sikkerava to show  
 simen we are  
 simmery pawn  
 simmery-mengres pawn-brokers  
 sivava to sew  
 siva mengri needle  
 siva-mengro tailor  
 skammen chair  
 skammen-mengro chair maker  
 skourdilla platter  
 skraunior boots  
 skunyes pins  
 slomava to follow  
 smentini cream  
 spikor skewers  
 spinyor carrots  
 stadj hat  
 stanya stable  
 stardo imprisoned  
 staripen prison

stiggur gate  
 stor four  
 stunnyi deer  
 subi-needlesueti people  
 suttur-gillie lullaby  
 ta and  
 talleno woollen  
 tardava to build  
 tardra-mengre hop-pickers  
 tas nest  
 tas cup  
 tasarla evening  
 tassamengri frying pan  
 tattipen heat  
 tatto hot  
 tavonie-yecks grandchildren  
 tavono little  
 tel hold!  
 tem country  
 temmo dark  
 tikno girlchild  
 tippoty spiteful  
 tobbar road  
 tororo beggar  
 traishava to frighten  
 tringrosh shilling  
 tringurushengre things costing a shilling  
 truppor stays (corset)  
 trusno dry  
 tud milk  
 tudlogueri milkmaid  
 tugno mournful  
 tuley below  
 tulipen fat  
 tuv tobacco  
 vaneshu nothing  
 vangus finger  
 vangustri ring  
 var flour  
 vardo cart  
 vassava bad  
 vast hard  
 vauros city  
 vellin bottle  
 vennor bowels  
 wafo another  
 wafo tem foreign land  
 wafo temeskoe-mush foreigner  
 wafodu bad  
 wafodu-tan bad place/hell  
 waffo-divvus yesterday  
 wardawa to guard

wardo cart  
 wardo-mescro cartwright/cooper  
 waro flour  
 waro-mescro miller  
 welling pali coming back  
 wen winter  
 wendror bowels/inside  
 werriga chain  
 wesh forest  
 weshengro woodsman  
 weshen-juggal fox  
 woddrus bed  
 wongar coal  
 wongar kamming-mush miner  
 wuddur door  
 wustava to cast

References

- Blake, N F (1981) *Non-standard Language in English Literature*, The Language Library (ed. David Crystal), André Deutsch, London.
- ✓ Crofton, H T (1887) "India-Shelta-Gipsy Language," *Indian Notes and Queries*, May, 4/44, 151-2.
- Grierson, G A (1887) "Gipsies in England and in India," *The Indian Antiquary*, January, 35-41.
- Halliday, M A K (1976) "Anti-languages," *University of East Anglia Working Papers in Linguistics*, April, 1, 15-45.
- ✓ *Indian Notes and Queries* (1887) "India-Gipsy tongue-Shelta," *Indian Notes and Queries*, April, 4/43, 132-3.
- Kress, G R and Hodge, R V (1979) *Language as Ideology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Leland, C G (1882) *Gypsies*, Trübner, London.
- Musgrove, S (1981) "Thieves' Cant in *King Lear*," *English Studies*, 62/1, 5-13.
- Newbold, Capt. (1856) "The Gypsies of Egypt," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Great Britain and Ireland)*, 16, 285-312.
- ✓ Norwood, T W (1887) "India-Shelta-Gipsy Language," *Indian Notes and Queries*, May, 4/44, 152.
- ✓ O'Shaughnessy, P (1975) "A Glossary of Market-Traders' Argot," *Lore and Language*, 2.3, 24-30, and (1978) 2.8, 20-24.
- Sastri, Pandit S M Natesa (1894) "Traders' Slang in Southern India," *The Indian Antiquary*, February, 49-52.
- Upton, C S (1974) "Language Butchered: Back-Slang in the Birmingham Meat Trade," *Lore and Language*, 2.1, 31-35.

David Clement

The Secret Languages of the Scottish Travelling People<sup>1</sup>

For more than a hundred years now scholars have been studying the language spoken by the Gypsies in Europe and the Middle East. This is now a thoroughly respectable branch of Indo-Iranian linguistics. The same progress has not been made with the languages of other nomadic peoples in Europe. Here again, lists were published last century of collections of words obtained from tinkers in Scotland<sup>2</sup> and Ireland<sup>3</sup>, but interest seemed to decline when it was discovered that these secret languages were not in the proper sense languages at all. They appear to have no phonology<sup>4</sup> or grammar of their own, only a vocabulary of a few hundred words superimposed on Gaelic or English in such a way as to be incomprehensible to outsiders not privy to the secret.

Although limited, the lexicon seems to be partly independent of the "host" languages - to the extent that certain words cannot be adequately translated into these languages. This paper is mainly concerned with the Lowland cant: the secret language of the travelling people of S and E Scotland. It presents some fascinating etymological problems, which may in turn throw some light on the origins of these people - these are by no means clear historically.

1. Earlier versions of this paper were given in Jerusalem at the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea in 1979, and in Glasgow at the International Conference of Minority Languages in 1980.
2. These are collated and discussed by Russel (1914/15).
3. Macalister (1937) collates and discusses the Irish material. Being a scholar of Celtic, he was able to dismiss the fanciful claims of the Victorian discoverers of Shelta (surprisingly supported by no less a

However, before passing to the main subject of the paper I wish to touch briefly on the Highland or Gaelic cant, the secret language spoken by the travelling people in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It is much harder to find good informants for this cant - they are geographically more remote and numerically much fewer. However, from what I have been able to collect so far, and from published lists I take it to be a form of Shelta<sup>6</sup>, one of the secret languages of Ireland. Shelta is widely known in Ireland to this day, but embedded in English, as none of the Irish travellers seem to know Irish. In Scotland, as far as it is spoken at all, it is used in a Gaelic framework. The English-speaking travellers in the Highlands use only the Lowland cant with the smallest admixture of Gaelic and Shelta words, as we shall see.

Of the several thousand families who travel the Lowlands and the Southern Highlands at least part of the year and acknowledge their connections with the travellers, all seem to know at least some of the cant. Their speech is markedly different from the small number of Gypsy families who have come in from England in recent times.

scholar than Kuno Meyer) concerning its antiquity. It does contain elements found in Old Irish, but then so do the modern Gaelic languages.

4. The phonology seems to be the same as that of the Scots dialects spoken by my informants. But since I was not sure that they all had the common Scots vowel system /i, e, ɪ, a, u, o/ I have used square brackets rather than slants to indicate the pronunciation. Similarly, I have indicated vowel length, which is morphologically determined in the Central dialects, but is not at least in the speech of Duncan Williamson, who was born in Mid-Argyll (SW Highlands).

5. Carmichael's list from Arran published by MacRitchie (1899-1901). It contains Lowland words as well, not surprising in view of the location in the Firth of Clyde. The travellers in Arran today have no Gaelic. Wilson's list from Tiree is interesting.

6. For a history and description of Shelta see Macalister (1937). I am grateful to Professor George Gmelch, now of the Dept. of Anthropology at Albany, S.U.N.Y., who has been working with the Irish travellers, for an up-to-date list of Shelta words in current use.

What is known of the history of the travelling people? From early times very little. The travellers themselves are rather vague about their origins, except that they are not connected with the Gypsies. The fair hair and skin of many Scottish and Irish travellers bears this out, though we shall see that the linguistic evidence is contradictory, at least in part. There are fanciful stories about the MacPhees of Caithness (some of whom have mongoloid features) being descended from shipwrecked Japanese sailors. The stories of stranded Jacobite soldiers may have a germ of truth and it seems to be agreed by traveller and scholar alike that the Gaelic-speaking Stewarts and perhaps some other Highland travellers are the descendants of dispossessed clansmen. There is evidence from Ireland, which I hope to develop in a future article on the origins of Shelta, that various classes of people, including scholars, took to the road in the wake of social upheavals which deprived them of their previous livelihood.

There are mediaeval references to "tinklers", but these are householders, and may have been tinsmiths by profession without being itinerant. Within living memory many tradesmen (e.g. tailors) in the Highlands were itinerant, and it is quite likely that this situation prevailed over large parts of Scotland in the Middle Ages and perhaps even into the period of industrialisation, so that the presence of tinkers and such would not excite comment.

The arrival of the first Gypsies in Scotland<sup>7</sup>, as in other parts of Europe, was spectacular. They were treated like royalty, which is what they represented themselves to be. Within a few years came the reaction, and laws were enacted against them of sufficient severity perhaps to encourage some to leave. But it seems likely that many followed the examples of the Douglasses, Youngs and Blythes of Kirk Yetholm in the

7. For a collection and discussion of these early encounters, see MacRitchie (1894).

Borders and espoused a settled life. The evidence that follows suggests that a significant number joined the indigenous travelling peoples of Scotland at the fairs and on the roads, and became so completely assimilated that neither the wellknown Gypsy names nor the classical "Indian" features have survived. Why then the vocabulary? Firstly, new words and synonyms are always at a premium, as old words become "blown" - known to the "country hantle", the settled people: *gadgie* "man, especially a non-traveller" is itself Romani in origin (< *gaujo*) and is now used in some Scots dialects; the existence of a large number of synonyms in the cant seems to have ensured its survival, together with the subtle semantic nuances so typical of the cant. The other factor seems to be continual reinforcement from the south. In southern Scotland there was contact with Gypsies south of the border, with the result that Romani words were transmitted. Although there are now Gypsies in Ireland the Shelta spoken there does not seem to contain many Romani words.

My informants<sup>8</sup> used between 25% and 35% Romani in their vocabulary, if one excludes from this English and Scots words used in exactly the same way as the settled people. This proportion seems to be constant as additional words occur to the informants and were added to the list. These are not peripheral vocabulary items - they include:

		Romani
dik	'see'	dik
ə'vri:	'away'	avri
ə'ne:	'in'	adré
bare	'good, big, fine'	bauro
pane	'water'	pani
pi:v	'drink'	
devəs	'day'	
jare	'egg'	yoro

8. I am grateful to the following for their patience in answering my questions and for opening up a new linguistic world to me (in alphabetical order): Lizzie Higgins, Belle Stewart, John Stewart, John Townsley, Betsy Whyte, Bryce Wyte, Duncan Williamson.

dume	'back'	
čo:r	'steal'	
mule	'kill'	
manəje	'woman'	manušni
gane	'hen'	kanni
jan	'know'	
maŋ	'speak, say'	mong
gav	'town'	gav
beš	'wood'	
ha:	'eat'	
haben	'food'	hoben
mar	'hurt'	mor
čure	'knife'	
grai	'horse'	
jag	'burn, coal'	
čave	'boy'	čavo
gure	'girl'	gairo
kare	'penis'	

The biggest single component consists of Scots words used in an unusual way and obsolete or dialect English words. By definition, Scots or standard English words used in the normal way do not constitute a part of the secret language. An example would be *hantle*, a Scots word which means "a handful" and hence "a little, a few" or *frad* "a frog".

A frequent use is the agentive suffix *-er/ler*: *winklers* "eyes", *trampers* "feet", *dancers* "stairs" and *sooklers* or *pappers* "breasts". In *glimmer* "fire" and *jodder* "a lump or mass" no synchronic analysis is possible. *Brucklers* "plates" (brittle?) and *chackers* "face" may belong here.

The suffix *-ment* occurs with a number of items: [stalement] ("stopping-place, campsite", cf. [stal] "stop, stay"). With [darkment] beside [darke] "night"; but in [belement] "(tent) door", no analysis is possible, similarly [futelments] "tools".

A very large number of items end in unstressed [e]. This is the universal development of vowels in open syllable, except after [r], where we find [jare] besides [bare] (cf. the Romani material above). It does not seem to have a diminutive function, which is one of the meanings of the *-ie* suffix in Scots. In most cases the [e] is not analysable as a

suffix at all. It may be in [darke] "night" and in [horne] "policeman" (cf. Scots *hornie* "the Devil"), but in forms like [gafe] "pig" [tobez] "police", [rufe]/[rafe] "the Devil", [skalde] "lower-class town-dweller" no analysis is possible. [switne] "sugar" is from either *sweet* or *sweeten*. [parez] "lice" may be from *parasites*.

Onomatopoeia may be behind the word [flatərən] for "fish" and some of the animal words like [gafe] "pig" [bafert] and [yafən] "dog". Both [pismolz] "ants" and [mæxəm] "hare" seem to be known in English dialects, as is [yərəm] "milk".

The vocabulary is eked out with adjectives such as *shan* (etymology obscure, unless from Irish *sean* "old") and *been*. Thus a *shan mort* is a prostitute, *shan mangin* is swearing and so on. *Been kane* is "church" *been cowl* is "husband" or anyone approved of, whereas *been gadgie* is a "gentleman" and *been hantle* "the gentry". A *shan gadgie* on the other hand is someone who hangs around the camps with immoral intent. *Been yerrum* is the same as *high colour* i.e. "blood". Similarly *kane* is widely used in many compounds: [məjx ken] is an asylum (cf. moich "mad") *peevin kane* is a pub (cf. [pi:v] "drink" supra).

Rather surprisingly, we find some Latin elements: [grɛnɪ] "corn, grain", [pɛnɪ] "bread" [kezm] "cheese" (from *grānum*, *panem* and *caesum* respectively). In addition there are a few words of Romance origin: *test* "head", *gammins* " (women's) thighs", *vile* "town" [kəmuš/kɾmuš] "shirt".

Two very common words appear to be of German origin: [mɔrgen] "morning" and [kɪnʃən] "child" (from *Kindchen*).

The number of Gaelic words seems to be very small. I collected [bučləx] "charm" (from Gaelic *buidseach* "magic"), [xrɛx] (from *creach*), [dɔr] "pig", [kɔnaxər] "rabbit" and [skri:v] (G. *sgriobh* or Scots *screeve*) "write". [salex] "swear" seems to come from Gaelic *salach* "dirty", but may ultimately come from a Romani word. Similarly [bixt] "vagina" seems too close to (Perthshire) Gaelic [p<sup>h</sup>i:xt] "ibid." for coincidence, al-

though English (dialect) *bight* may have been a factor.

Finally, can we detect some words of Shelta, either from the Highland travellers or from Ireland, where many of the travellers have been? Although the regular word for road is *lig* (etymology obscure to me) Betsy Whyte uses the phrase *on the tober* "on the road, travelling"; *tober* is a good example of back-slang in Shelta, coming from Irish *bóthar*. My transcription of *moochie* "rabbit" agrees exactly with Macalister's [mut'i] (Shelta, etymology obscure). Betsy Whyte gave *minker* beside *mink* for "traveller" (from *tinker*). [sčumer] "pipe" is apparently also Shelta. It is possible that I have failed to recognise Shelta words in the lists obtained from my informants, but it seems clear that Shelta does not constitute a significant element in the Lowland cant. This is all the more surprising as almost all of my informants had Gaelic-speaking grandparents or at least great-grandparents.

The conclusions that one can draw from our examination of the Lowland cant are thus somewhat inconclusive, as far as casting light on the origins of the Scottish travellers is concerned. The strong Romani element in the basic vocabulary contradicts the appearance of the travellers and their own feeling that they are Scottish and quite distinct from the Gypsies. The answer is probably that the numbers of Gypsies in Scotland were not great at any time, and that they were absorbed by the settled population and by a pre-existent body of indigenous Scottish travelling people, who nevertheless accepted and preserved the linguistic infusion, even in the case of common words like [manəje] "woman" and [gaje] "man". The older Gypsies in Scotland and England have Gypsy folktales, whereas the travellers have Child Ballads and international tales, which they have or once had in common with the settled people. They are in many cases the last faithful bearers of this common tradition, but they have imposed none of their own cultural stamp on these, except perhaps in the choice of repertoire which survives. There are a few comic songs in cant, but it is not a significant element in the repertoire. The lack of Irish influence on the language is surprising in view of contacts

in recent times: evidently this was confined to the Highland travellers. Despite the possibility that the travellers represent a very ancient tradition of itinerant metal workers it was not possible to identify pre-Celtic elements in the cant, nor are there any obvious P-Celtic etymologies. However, a considerable number remain obscure.

In conclusion, what is the prognosis for these secret languages? The Highland cant seems not to be used any more, except by a few older individuals. The Lowland cant is known widely among the younger travellers, but seems to be lost in succeeding generations when the families stop travelling around and take to living in houses.<sup>9</sup> All of my informants are now in houses, though one was living in a tent when the study was begun. Modern inventions have destroyed many of the traditional trades. Cheap plastic objects have replaced the metal cups and buckets the traveller tinsmiths made and repaired. Telephones and individual transport have undermined the travellers' role as a purveyor of news, which made them so welcome especially in remote rural districts. The hundreds of camping places have been replaced by a small number of large official campsites. From the few others where they are tolerated they are liable to be moved on at the whim of the landowner, be he a private individual or a county council. The scale and scope of agricultural work has declined as many labouring jobs disappear. Only berry-picking and some work involving potatoes and turnips are still done manually by gangs of traveller families. Ironically, scrap metal collecting and social security money have put more cash in travellers' pockets than they ever had before, but at the expense of the mobility: both activities imply proximity to a fixed base, usually urban.<sup>10</sup> With the demise of the

9. The earlier pattern was to spend the winter in a house, while the children fulfilled the minimum number of days' attendance at school. In the early summer the family took to the road with a horse and cart and camped out. For a description of this way of life between the wars, see Whyte's autobiography (1979).

free travelling the social life has suffered. Portable televisions in caravans have begun to supplant the campfire singsongs and storytelling sessions. The richness of the narrative material being collected by fieldworkers of the School of Scottish Studies shows that these traditional skills are not dead, but one wonders how much longer they will be maintained in the face of assimilatory pressures from modern society. When the travellers cease to be a distinct social group, one feels that their language will also disappear, leaving only vestiges in playground slang and in academic studies such as this.

10. For a similar trend among Irish travellers, see Gmelch (1976) and Gmelch (1977).

#### References

- Gmelch G. 1977, *The Irish tinkers: the urbanization of an itinerant people*, Menlo Park, California
- Gmelch S. 1976, *Tinkers and Travellers*, Montreal
- Macalister R.A.S. 1937, *The Secret Languages of Ireland*, Cambridge
- MacRitchie D. 1894, *Scottish Gypsies under the Stewarts*, Edinburgh
- MacRitchie D. 1899-1901, Shelta: the Cairds' Language, in: *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* Vol xxiv
- Russell A. 1914/15, Scoto-Romani and Tinklers' Cant, reprinted from the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Vol. VIII, Part I
- Whyte B. 1979, *Yellow on the Broom*, Edinburgh
- David Clement  
Linguistic Survey of Scotland (Gaelic)  
University of Edinburgh  
GB Edinburgh Eh8 9LD

"The Secret Languages of the Scottish Travelling People" by David Clement is reproduced with permission from *Grazer Linguistische Studien : Sprachliche Sonderformen* Vol. XV (1981) pp.17-25.

## Shelta and Polari

IAN HANCOCK

## Introduction

Both Shelta and Polari may be treated together typologically, and to a very limited extent socially, but they have few shared vocabulary items, and their histories are very different.

They are both widely spoken, in Britain and overseas; Shelta by as many as 15,000 in England and Wales alone (Acton and Davies, 1979: 102); Bewley (1974: 16) puts the population in the Irish Republic at 'about 6,000'. Those who have a corpus of Polari words in their ordinary speech, and who are aware that their use constitutes a discrete linguistic register, probably amount to something more than that.

Shelta speakers form what has repeatedly been referred to in the literature as a 'caste' of people – today we'd more fashionably call them an ethnic group; whether this is justifiable or not, Shelta at any rate has all the characteristics of an ethnic language which Polari, spoken by a variety of social and professional groups, does not. Even though each is essentially a collection of ingroup words used in the framework of English, Shelta is perceived of by its speakers as a distinct language; Polari is not. Many of the Polari items listed below have fallen out of use, to the extent that one hesitates to equate a knowledge of, say, twenty Polari words with a knowledge of Polari itself. Shelta has status among nearly all groups of Travellers – Polari does not. Leland learnt this when he was first introduced to Shelta in 1876 by an itinerant whom he met in Somerset, who told him (Leland, 1882: 354–5) that

Back slang an' cantin' and rhymin' is grown vulgar, and Italian always *was* the lowest of the lot; thieves' *kennick* is genteel alongside of organ-grinder's lingo, you know.

In terms of their synchronic characteristics, both Shelta and Polari are vestigial languages; that is, they each give evidence of having once been 'complete' linguistic entities.

## Shelta

*Origins*

The name 'Shelta' has become well-established for those who have studied it, but it does not seem now to be current amongst the speakers of the language, who use, however, a variety of other names such as 'Gammon', 'Tarri', or simply 'The Cant' (< Irish *caint* 'speech'). The name Shelta was no doubt more current at an earlier time, since three different scholars recorded it at first hand during the same ten-year period. Leland (Barrère and Leland, 1889: xviii) suggests an origin for 'Shelta' in the word *Celtic*, though this does not seem likely.

There are, broadly speaking, two divisions within the language, probably best labelled the Gaelic and the English, i.e. spoken in Ireland (and Scotland), and in England (and Wales) respectively. The latter variety contains considerably fewer non-English words. Sampson (1891) remarked on these two kinds of Shelta nearly a century ago, and the situation still obtains – see Clement (1981: 18), who was unable to find Gaelic Shelta in Ireland:

Shelta is widely known in Ireland to this day, but embedded in English, as none of the Irish travellers seem to know Irish. In Scotland, as far as it is spoken at all, it is used in a Gaelic framework.

The process of lexical replacement – English for Shelta – is a continuing one; Harper and Hudson (1971: 82) noted an 80 per cent loss of non-English items across an eighty-year period in American Travellers' Cant (originally Shelta); such loss does not seem to be so drastic in Britain. There are other differences between Gaelic and English Shelta too: the occurrence of non-English grammatical features, the frequency of use of items from Angloromani and from British Cant, and so on. However, all Shelta dialects have a core vocabulary which they share, and which is demonstrably of Irish derivation. Taken altogether, the supposedly Irish element in the language probably amounts to between 2,000 and 3,000 words, which are spoken in an almost entirely English grammatical mould. Like Clement, Maher (in L'Amie, forthcoming) notes that very few Shelta speakers in Ireland can speak Irish, which may account for this.

Shelta first appeared in print over 170 years ago, in an article on Irish by McElligott in which he referred to a 'Fenian' dialect of that language, Berla Feine, used by the old poets and which 'underwent some little alteration, whereby it is impossible even for natives to read' (McElligott, 1808: 10), and to

another dialect spoken in the county of Cork, and a little in Limerick, Clare and Kerry, called Berlagar na Sær or Mason's Jargon, which seems to me to be a remnant of some of the languages or dialects above mentioned . . . it will appear to be ancient and worth preserving. (Ibid.)

He followed this with a list of words, some of which are found in modern Shelta. In 1859 Edward Fitzgerald published a list of about 250 words and sentences in the same Berlagar na Sær, the secret language of stonemasons (1858–9: 384ff.). Berlagar na Sær is a professional jargon similar to Shelta, though without the extensive lexical disguise (discussed below) and with greater grammatical retention from Irish. An American variety of this dialect has been discussed by Arnold (1898). Another word-list, supposedly collected in the 1850s, was that of Norwood, published in 1887. But the 'discovery' of Shelta is usually credited to Charles Godfrey Leland, who first wrote about it in the *New Quarterly* in 1880, and who believed that he was 'the only man who has collected or published a word or a vocabulary of it' (Savage, 1895: 436). Because of its obvious Celtic content, and because of the Irish connection of its speakers (Leland did not encounter the language in Ireland itself), and no doubt because of his penchant for the romantic, Leland believed, rather like McElligott, that it was very old – a previously unknown Goidelic language, kept alive in secret by its speakers, who were themselves, he suggested, the descendants of a distinct prehistoric population of bronzeworkers.

The debate surrounding the origins and affinities of Shelta is an ongoing one (Harper, 1969, 1972, 1973; Hancock, 1974; Cash, 1977; Seaholm, 1977; Butler, 1979), and useful bibliographies have been compiled for further research (Reinecke *et al.* 1975: 622–31; Gmelch and Gmelch, 1977: 159–69; L'Amie, forthcoming). John Sampson, who collected most of the available texts of Gaelic Shelta during the late nineteenth century, was able to discern a number of phonological modifications of original Irish words, some of which he believed to predate 1000 AD. These modifications included, e.g. pronouncing the word backwards, adding extra prefixes or suffixes, and so on (see below).

An early origin for Shelta was also proposed by Kuno Meyer, who worked with the same informant that Sampson used, and who cited by way of support a number of rules for 'the manufacture of artificial language' (1909: 243) taken from a ninth-century Irish manuscript, some of which apply to Shelta. Meyer believed that Shelta must have been created by scholars, possibly monks or poets, because the mechanisms for its creation were too ingenious for illiterate people to have devised. This point of view was maintained by Macalister (1937), whose study remains the most complete to date, despite its subjectivity and a certain lack of linguistic sophistication. Seaholm (1977: 12) sees the origin and perpetuation of the language rooted in the asocial status of its speakers, and points out that earlier scholars have arrived at false conclusions because of their lack of familiarity with minority-group psychology. This lacuna has been filled in part by the more recent work of Acton and Davies (1979: 91–110).

The various studies by Harper on the English Shelta-based Cant spoken in the southern United States reiterate that Leland, Sampson and Meyer were wrong in believing that Shelta descended from an ancient tongue, and in his M.A. thesis (1969) he gives convincing evidence for a much more recent origin which, in a later, unpublished paper he puts at c. 1700 AD (1973: 12). The hypothesis of an early origin, he said, has come about partly because of romanticism and partly from an incomplete understanding of the historical phonology of Irish. He also disagreed that it could not have been created by illiterates, arguing that 'the evidence points to the contrary' (Harper and Hudson, 1971: 82). On the other hand, Cash, himself of Traveller stock and a speaker of the language, DOES find it 'difficult to believe that an itinerant, fragmented people could have invented such a complex, in many ways sophisticated, and internally-consistent, language' (1977: 180). He believes also that 'there are far more Shelta words than have ever been recorded' (loc. cit.), and gives random examples of a number of these not listed anywhere previously. Thomas Acton, of the Thames Polytechnic School of Social Science, who has considerable acquaintance with Shelta, estimates that some speakers he has met have a working knowledge of over 2,000 Shelta words, and says that new items are constantly being recorded from contemporary speakers (personal communication).

Some observations worth considering about Shelta's origins have been made more recently by Sinead Shuinear Butler (1979), who believes that Shelta in fact does have an ancient, even pre-Celtic, origin, overlain with 'Oghamizations', i.e. intentionally crypticized, pre-Christian druidic Irish forms, at a very early date. She points out that too much has been made of the techniques of word-disguise, that these techniques are not extensively applied in terms of the whole available lexicon, and that over half of the, c. 900 items collected by Macalister (from other people's works) cannot be satisfactorily etymologized in terms of Irish or any other known language. She refers to, but does not pursue, Stokes's suggestion (1872) that some of the cryptic vocabulary in Irish, and hence in Irish secret languages, may be of Pictish origin.

One must agree with Butler's scepticism regarding lexical sources; it may be that the very fact that the words are not all of Irish origin has caused such elaborate suggestions to be made to explain their forms. While some items are clearly relatable to specific Irish sources, many of them could equally well be derived from any language using the same techniques and a little inventiveness: thus *gop* 'kiss' (< Irish *póg* with reversal) might also be explained by taking the English word and applying initial voicing, medial vowel retraction and final desibilantization. With the exception of one or two of the processes listed by Macalister, such as reversal, the distribution of these supposed modifications is quite random.

#### *Lexicon and phonological disguise, grammar*

According to Macalister's analysis, the following occur in Shelta (examples include all of those which appear in the texts on pages 389–90).

- (i) Reversal: *Ayən* 'nine' < *naoi*; *gɔp* 'kiss' < *póg*; *kam* 'son' < *mac*; *nɔp* 'white' < *bán*; *ɔd* 'two' < *do*; *rɔg* 'car' < *carr*
- (ii) Reversal with substitution: *Greydi* 'make, do' < *deinim*; *nɔp* 'neck' < *muineal*; *sɔlk* 'take' < *glac*
- (iii) Reversal plus suffixation: *Niydyeš* 'no, not' < *ni ead*; *turpowg* 'rag' < *ceirt*
- (iv) Prefixing plus suffixation: *Gatər* 'father' < *athair*; *graniy* 'understand' < *aithnim*; *sluwn* 'Monday' < *Luain*
- (v) Substitution of prefix plus suffixation: *Ta:dyiraθ* 'strength' < *láidir*
- (vi) Loss of syllable plus substitution. *Mɔnik* 'name' < *ainm*; *skɔp* 'open' < *oscailt*
- (vii) De-nasalization: *Bin* 'good' < *min*; *labərt* 'exchange' < *malairtaigh*
- (viii) De-aspiration (= spirantization): *Skɔp* 'open' < *oscailt*

In addition to these phonological modifications, the language is further disguised by the inclusion of archaisms (e.g. *bin* 'good' < *min*; *karb* 'grandmother' < *frac*); items from Romani (*goštə* 'enough' < *dosta*; *kani* 'hen' < *kaini*) and English Cant e.g. *čeyt* 'thing', *wədlə* 'duck' (< *cheat*, *waddler*). English Cant has in turn acquired from Shelta such items as *monicker* 'name' (< Shelta *mānik* < Irish *ainm*) and *gammy* 'bad' (< Shelta *gyamyəθ* < Irish *cam*).

Metaphor is also apparent in *gləχ* 'man', from Irish *glacaim* 'hero, champion', and semantic shift: *gyami* 'bad' < Irish *cam* 'crooked, bent'; *getul* 'tremble' < Irish *scáth*, or *eagla* 'fear'; *tribliy* 'crowd' < Irish *teaghlach* 'family'. The lexicon has been expanded by means of nominalizing enclitics (*tadyi* 'strong' > *tadyirəθ* 'strength'; *gyami* 'bad' > *gyamiəθ* 'badness, evil'; *mānyī* 'good' > *mānyəθ* 'goodness'), which are also employed for semantic extension (*guk* 'old man' > *gukra* 'old beggar'; *yuk* 'man' > *yukra* 'beggar'; *gladər* 'skin' > *gladəriy* 'half-naked beggar', etc.). Incoined forms include *kadyəg nap* 'lime', lit. 'white stone', *byowr skeyv* 'fishwife', lit. 'woman fish', *nyak reglām* 'brass', lit. 'rogue iron', *gety grimšər* 'summer', lit. 'hot time', *gwəp grimšər* 'winter', lit. 'cold time', *li: nedyas* 'bed', lit. 'lie place', *nedyas gyər* 'brothel', lit. 'place penis', *kunya kyena* 'latrine' lit. 'shit house', *Skai Gruwt* 'America', lit. 'water new', *skai šural* 'river' lit. 'water run(ning)', etc. Among calques on English are found *skai'd* 'be transported (to the American and Australian penal colonies)', lit. 'watered', *gladər* 'skin', both anatomical, and as a verb meaning 'to swindle', and *lās swart*, lit. 'drink up'. Further examples of some of the processes employed to enlarge the vocabulary in Shelta are found in Hancock (1980: 63–88); similar techniques in a secret variety of American English (unrelated to Shelta) are found in Adams (1971).

Grammatically, Shelta structure is basically that of English, with certain characteristics reflecting Irish syntax, such as occasional post-nominal adjectives. Sentence-final verbs are also characteristic of the language:

- (1) Have you the feen's dorah nyocked?  
'Did you take the man's bread?'

This differs from the usual SVO order of English and the VSO order of Gaelic sentences. Articles are seldom used and there is often relativizer deletion:

- (2) niydyəs greydi gyamyəθ mwiylšə  
'people [who] do badness [to] me'.

The locative/existential verb is *steyš*, which also means 'yes', but there is no copula:

- (3) Dwiylšə munyi tariər  
'You [are] [a] good talker'

All of these features alternate with constructions more closely approximating those of English, while some varieties, such as that mentioned by Clement (1981), are characterized by greater influence from Gaelic.

The nature of Shelta may be seen from the following four passages, the first of which has been analysed. This is the Lord's Prayer as collected by Sampson in the 1890s and reproduced by Macalister (1937: 139–40). It is the same as the 'Gaelic Shelta' in the rest of his texts. The second is a song (Connors and Acton, 1974: 11–12) which, like the third and fourth examples (Moran, 1980; Casey, 1980) is representative of contemporary 'English' Shelta. The first was recorded in Liverpool and is given both in Sampson's own orthography, and in a phonemic approximation based on that of Macalister. The last three were recorded in London.

1. Mūilsha's gather, swūrth ā mūnniath, mūnni-graūa-krađyi  
mwiylšə's ga:tər swart ə manyəθ mānyī grə ə kradyi  
I's father above in goodness luck at standing

dhūilsha's mūnnik. Gra be grēdhi'd shedhi ladhu, as aswūrth  
diylšə's mānik grə be greydi'd šeydi la:du as əswart,  
you's name love be make -ed upon earth as above

in mūnniath. Būg mūilsha thaləsk-minūrth goshta dhurra. G[e]tul  
in manyəθ bəg mwiylšə taləsk minyart gəštə duwrə getyəl  
in goodness give I/me day now enough bread forgiveness

our shakū, araik mūilsha getyas nīdyas grēdhi gamiath mūilsha.  
our ša:kuw əreyk mwiylšə getyas niydyəs greydi gyamyəθ mwiylšə  
our sin same I forgive-s person-s do badness I/me

Nijesh solk mwī-īl stūrth gamiath, but bug mūilsha achim  
niydeš solk mwiyl start gyamyəθ but bəg mwiylšə aχim  
not take I/me into badness but take I/me out of

gamiath. Dhī-īl the sridug, thardyūrath, and mūnniath gradhum a gradhum.  
gyamyəθ diyil the sriydug ta:dyirəθ and mānyəθ gradum ə gradum.  
badness you the kingdom strength and goodness life and life.

2. As I was a-krushing through the town 'going'  
one day,

A bold young buffer boy passed my way; 'non-Traveller'  
I korbed him so hard, I broke his pi, 'hit'; 'head'  
And the next thing I knew, the shades 'police'  
had took me.

Sing tooralī-tooralī-ooralī-ay,  
Sing tooralī-tooralī-ooralī-ay.

I korbed him that hard 'hit'  
I broke his pi, 'head'

And the next thing I knew,  
The shades had bogged me. 'police'; 'taken'  
Now I sit in the sherrig 'jail'

By night and by day,  
Eating mouldy potatoes  
And rotten old feah. 'meat'

Now all you bold Travellers  
Take warning here too,  
Don't you get to korbing 'fighting'  
Or the shades'll take you; 'police'  
Whoa for that!

3. Sooblik inorsha in a shop, lakeen  
wids 'galyune, the feen's gloaking'.  
Lakeen and sooblik mistle out the  
door. The shopkeeper calls the  
shades. The shades mistle up the  
mauli. The byuer wids 'galyune,  
hide the gohorrah'. The feens  
mistle up to the shades. 'We  
think you have a little boy here  
stole some sweets from the shop'.  
A feen wids 'I'm very sorry, I  
won't let my gohorrah do it again'.  
The shades mistle away.'

A boy is here in a shop. The girl  
says 'hey pal, the man's looking'.  
The girl and the boy go out the  
door. The shopkeeper calls the  
police. The shades come up the  
street. The woman says 'hey pal,  
hide the child'. The men  
go up to the police. 'We  
think you have a little boy here  
who stole some sweets from the shop'.  
The man says 'I'm very sorry, I  
won't let my child do it again'.  
The policemen go away.

4. The byuer inorsha is mistling  
to the market. She mistles down  
to the stall with the crotts.  
She bogs a crott for the lakeen.  
The lakeen runs. The byuer on  
the stall gloaks her bogging the  
crott. She says 'Hey, you come  
back!' The byuer hides herself  
in a garden. The byuer on the  
stall comes gloaking around. She  
couldn't find her. The traveller  
byuer mistles off home.

The woman here is going  
to the market. She goes down  
to the stall with the coats.  
She takes a coat for the girl.  
The girl runs. The woman on  
the stall sees her taking the  
coat. She says 'hey, you come  
back!' The woman hides herself  
in a garden. The woman on the  
stall comes looking around. She  
couldn't find her. The traveller  
woman goes off home.

## Polari

Unlike Shelta, Polari was probably not consciously created, but is either the result of gradual language loss or decay, or else of large-scale interference from another language upon an already existing English cant. It survives only as a lexicon of between 80 and 100 words, and it is extremely unlikely that any single speaker today is familiar with them all. Some Polari items have become current outside of the register: *ponce*, *scarper*, *mankey*, *carsey*, *charver*, etc.; the name of the register, also spelt *Parliaree*, *Palarie*, etc., is probably derived from Italian *parlare* 'to speak'.

Today, words which may have an origin in Polari turn up in the language of the theatre, the circus, in show business and in the speech of certain male homosexual communities, especially those with connections with show business and with life at sea. Its sources are unclear; it is certainly lexically Romance-based, in particular Italian, and this – together with its nautical connection – suggests an origin in the *Lingua Franca*, a fact to which Partridge has already alluded (1948: 122). Modern Polari is more likely, however, to be of composite origin, having elements from the *Lingua Franca*, Italian, and Cant – 'Cant' here referring to the speech of road people, criminals, etc., generally, rather than to Shelta, which is also known as the Cant. The former, according to Wilde (1889: 306), originated in the eleventh century:

At the time of the Conquest, under Norman oppression, many of the Saxons became outlaws and thieves. The language of these vagabonds was the language of the conquered, because they knew no other speech, and generation after generation simply continued this, with little or no change ... this is English Cant.

## Lingua Franca

Until the turn of the twentieth century *Lingua Franca* was spoken in the major ports along the Mediterranean coast. Its origins are usually thought to date from the time of the Crusades (Hadel, 1969; Coates, 1971; Collier, 1977) although this has been disputed by Whinnom (1977), who points out that no concrete evidence exists for this supposition. Another hypothesis links *Lingua Franca* with the 'Commercial Latin' of the previous millennium (Hancock, 1977). Whatever its origins, existing texts show that it was typologically a pidgin, being native to nobody, having a very much reduced structure, and with a lexicon which was primarily Italian and southern Romance, indicated by such forms as *lingo*, *sabir*, but which differed from place to place reflecting the languages of its surroundings.

Its main structural characteristics included invariable nominal and verbal forms, though morphological interference from the various native languages of its speakers was consistently apparent, with e.g. plurals and tenses marked by enclitics. Only one bound morpheme really became stabilized in the language, which served to show past tense. All grammatical relationships were otherwise indicated syntactically, with free morphemes. Plurality and gender were not regularly shown, and possession was expressed by following the noun with *di* plus the appropriate invariable nominal:

mi sabir	'I know'	butia di mi	'my bottle(s)'
ti star	'you are'	kadera di ti	'your chair(s)'
elu avir	'(s)he has'	lingo di elu	'his/her language(s)'

As in a number of other Romance-related pidgins and creoles (e.g. *Papiamentu*, *Papia Kristang*, etc.), the object noun phrases of transitive verbs were marked with a particle, which in *Lingua Franca* was *per*:

- (4) Ti mirar per mučera di Eduardo  
'You're looking at Edward's wife'
- (5) Voi amar per noi  
'You (pl.) love us'

The unmarked verb has no tense reference, this being assumed from the context. Where it was necessary to specify tense or aspect, intention ('future') came to be indicated by placing *bizonyo* before the subject, though there is no record of this construction before the nineteenth century:

- (6) Bizonyo ti lavorar kon mi  
'You will work with me'
- (7) Bizonyo il mučacu jokar aki  
'The boy(s) will play here'

Past action was indicated by suffixing *-to* to the verb minus its final *-r*, and recently completed action by inserting *ja* between these:

ti mirato	'you saw'
ti ja mirato	'you've already seen'
elu voluto	'(s)he wanted'
elu ja voluto	'(s)he has already wanted'

A great deal has been written about the *Lingua Franca*, which is the earliest recorded European pidgin known to us, and which (it has been suggested) served as the model for subsequent European-lexicon creoles now spoken throughout the world by millions of people, including many of the inhabitants of Britain of West Indian origin. Such a connection is, however, a tenuous one at best. It was certainly known to sailors from many European nations including England, on the Mediterranean run, and references to it have occurred from time to time in western literature since the late Middle Ages. Molière has a *Lingua Franca*-speaking Turk in his *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, and Cervantes before him refers to it in *Don Quixote* as the language spoken 'between slaves and Moors all over Barbary, and even in Constantinople ... neither Moorish nor Castilian, nor the tongue of any other country, but a mixture of every language, in which we can all understand each other'. No indication was given at that early date of a specific Italian component in *Lingua Franca*.

Coelho (1880: 187) has already suggested that sailors returning to England from the sea may well have interspersed their talk with nauticisms and *Lingua Franca* words and expressions not only unconsciously, but also as a means of creating what Halliday has called an 'anti-language', a means of keeping oneself and one's community insulated from the establishment and the law. However, since Polari survives today as a lexicon specifically associated with theatrical, circus and homosexual environments, we are still obliged to explain how these different social contexts are related.

If a thread can be said to connect them, it is probably a nautical one. Sailors home from the sea, unused to a static means of livelihood, were drawn to the Road for a living, joining troupes of players, sideshows and hiring-fairs (Ribton-Turner, 1887: *passim*; Salgado, 1977: 138). Perhaps the circus tradition of tattooing originated with these same sailors. Sometimes they became travelling peddlers and merchants; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Polari seems to have developed in England, this kind of transient population was very common, having its origins in the Middle Ages (see chapter 23). Mayhew, writing in 1851, was certainly wrong when he said that Italianisms had been introduced 'but lately' into showmen's cant; possible examples of these turn up in earlier decades: *bever*, *bene*, *fake*, *commission*, *lingo*, *gad-so*, *gambs*, etc., for example, are listed in Grose (1785). Although Leland was unaware of Polari as such, he did acknowledge an Italian element in English slang, putting the introduction of Italian words into the language in the sixteenth century (Barrère and Leland, 1889: xix):

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth many Italian words found their way not only into English literature but also into slang, and additions have occasionally been made since then from the same source.

Homecoming seamen were sometimes obliged to take to the roads against their will, and became a part of the wandering population as a result. In 1601 the 'Acte for the necessarie Reliefe of Souldiers and Mariners' (13 Elizabeth I c.3) was passed, which confirms that sailors returning to England were often put ashore very far from where they were to be paid off:

Whereas it must needs fall out that many of suche hurte and mayned Souldiers and Marriners doe arrive in Portes and Places far remote from the Counties whence they are by Vertue of this Acte to receive their yeerlie Annuities and Pensions; as also they are prescribed by this Maister or Receiver Generall of the Muster Rolles, who is commonlie like to abide aboute the Courte of London, so that they shall neede at the firste provision for the bearing of their Charges to such places.

Such individuals, wounded and not able to receive their pay at once, had to make their way across England as best they could, joining the post-Renaissance masses of rogues and sturdy-beggars for the protection they afforded, living off their wits and frequently running afoul of the law. In 1713 an act (13 Anne c. 26) was passed which operated against such road people, but which specifically exempted sailors, probably in recognition of the legitimacy of their plight:

All persons ... wandering abroad ... (except Soldiers, Mariners or Seafaring Men licenced by som Testimonial) are Persons to be deemed rogues and vagabonds, and who, if found wandering and begging, are to be punished as such.

Needless to say, a whole class of beggars pretending to be sailors sprang up, leading to the repeal of that law in 1792 (32 George III c. 45) during the reign of George III:

The permission formerly accorded to soldiers and mariners is highly improper, and those of them who beg shall be deemed rogues and vagabonds.

This road contact, then, can be considered to have been the cause of the earliest introduction of Lingua Franca into Britain.

#### *Influences on Polari and its current use*

Eric Partridge is the only person to have written about Polari at any length, referring fleetingly to its connections with the Lingua Franca, the circus and the theatre. Like R. Compton Rhodes, whom he refers to in Partridge (1948: 116), he believed that it 'existed among itinerant actors and showmen throughout the 18th century'. Circus slang, he says, is '... little more than a mixture of Cockney and Romany (with a few words from Lingua Franca and the underworld), and lacks individual character except in its vestiges, which resemble ghosts rather than survivors' (Partridge, 1970: 247). He goes on to say that it is 'a slang that has much in common with Parlyaree', and more specifically (Ibid.: 249) that it '... in the 19th century detached itself from the moribund Parlyaree'. Regarding its link with the acting profession, he notes that 'until about the end of the eighteenth century, actors were so despised that in self-protection, they had certain words that should properly be described as cant and were actually known as Parlyaree' (Ibid.: 223). But despite these observations, his sections on sailors' and theatrical slang say no more about Polari, nor do they list any words from it – all of which are given in his discussion of circus life. The shortcomings of Partridge's etymological excursions are amply dealt with by Legman (1966: lxxxiii–xc).

The connection with male (and not, apparently, female) homosexual speech is also through the sea and the theatre, milieux which have traditionally been comfortable ones for homosexuals. Little linguistic research has been done in this area, though a social comment is made by Chesney (1972: 328–9), who briefly discusses the connection between sailors and homosexuality and who suggests that 'it was probably in the great ports that the most genuinely professional male prostitution was to be found'. Polari items have been confirmed by the writer (Hancock, 1973) in the speech of homosexuals from London, Sydney and San Francisco, none of whom are connected with either circus or theatrical life. An ex-seaman with an extensive knowledge of Polari writes (in personal communication, courtesy of Dr John Holm), that

Having served for a number of years in the British Merchant Navy I thought I would drop you a line with as many examples of ship-board slang as I could remember. I never thought of the words as being remnants of Lingua Franca, but rather as bastardized Italian ... they seem to have derived from the wit and imagination of the gay sailors themselves.

Peter Burton, who lectures on Polari in London and who has written on the dialect, believes that it is, in part at least:

derived from foreign words which were brought into this country by various influxes of refugees – from the days of the Huguenots fleeing from the wrath of Catherine de Medici to the Jews flying from the pogroms in Russia and Poland ... Polari has always seemed a curiously English phenomenon ... it was a secret language born out of repression. It owed allegiance to and was curiously linked with the curious argots developed by the 'underworld' groups – the Gypsies, the blacks, the drug sub-culture, the criminal, the racing fraternity (Burton, 1979: 23).

Burton's labelling of Gypsies and Blacks as 'underworld' peoples speaking 'curious argots' is scarcely justifiable. His hypothesis that Polari words were introduced by outsiders coming into Britain, however, might be upheld as being more in keeping with some of the facts we have – though there is nothing clearly Gypsy or Black in Polari, and Sephardic immigrants would more likely have contributed Romance words to the dialect than would have Ashkenazim from Russia and Poland.

Two other sources of Italianisms need to be acknowledged, since they may well have helped to reinforce the currency of some of the items listed below, and to have given at least some of them a more specifically Italian form, besides contributing words of their own. Firstly, many Italian Punch and Judy men, monkey trainers, organ grinders and peddlers of crutches, buttons, ribbons, etc., came into Britain during the 1840s, and naturally had close association with showpeople. Frianoro (1627) and Lacroix (1874: 475–7) provide some discussion of the *Bianti* or *Ceretani*, those who comprised the 'argotic kingdom' in Renaissance Italy and who spoke Gergo or Italian cant. Secondly, though perhaps less likely, were the 'great number of Italian children' Ribton-Turner describes (1887: 303–4):

Persons known as *padroni*, acting generally two together and working alternate six months in Italy and England, obtained the children from their parents in the Neapolitan districts ... they were then placed in depôts in London, whence they were distributed throughout the country in suitable groups under experienced members of the fraternity. They were sent into the streets by day to play, or to pretend to play, a musical instrument, singing and dancing in time to it, and at night they performed in like manner in public houses. In recent years the importation of Italian girls has much increased; they slept in the same room as their padroni and, sad to say, were used, under various pretences, for the most immoral purposes ... [because of] ... their total ignorance of our language, and the general ignorance of their own language in England, these poor children are thus completely cut off from verbal intercourse with our people ... this system has all the characteristics of a slave trade and slavery. (Taken from the Report to the Committee of Inquiry of the Charity Organization Society, London, 1887).

Hotten (1864: 22–3) acknowledges the nautical introduction of Lingua Franca-derived items into English, but clearly attributes cant of Italian origin to a separate source. Of the former he says:

*Lingua Franca*, or bastard Italian [sic] spoken at Genoa, Trieste, Malta, Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria and all Mediterranean seaport towns. The ingredients of this imported cant are many. Its foundation is Italian, with a mixture of Modern Greek, German (from the Austrian ports), Spanish, Turkish and French. It has been introduced to the notice of the London wandering tribes by the sailors, foreign and English, who trade to and from the Mediterranean seaports, by the swarms of organ-players from all parts of Italy, and by the makers of images from Rome and Florence, all of whom, in dense thoroughfares, mingle with our lower orders.

And of the latter:

Many of the Cant terms, again ... are Italian, got from the wandering musicians and others; indeed, the showmen have but lately introduced a number of Italian phrases into their Cant language.

Like Hotten, Baumann, in his book on British slang and cant (1887: cviii) believed that Lingua Franca and Italian items in English came into the language via separate origins.

There are no texts in Polari, and it does not now seem to be spoken in connected sequences. Hotten gave as an example *scarper with the feele of the donna of the cassey* ('run off with the landlady's daughter'), but this may well have been contrived by himself. Today, constructions of this length would be quite unusual, though a similar passage is given by way of illustration, below – also a non-spontaneous sample. In any case, the function of Polari is not to provide a completely separate lexical system from English, but rather a pool of 'secret' words sufficient to make cryptic any utterance that needs to be kept from outsiders. It also serves as a factor of social cohesion for those who use it. Like Shelta – though unlike its ancestor, Lingua Franca – Polari functions to erect barriers between people, rather than to break them down.

Polari is a lexicon. While Shelta exhibits some grammatical and syntactic features of its own (discussed above), there is nothing un-English about the structure of Polari, although like Shelta it continues to generate new words from original combinations of its existing morpheme stock: e.g. *ogle-riahs* 'eyelashes', lit. 'eye hairs', and *omie-pollone* 'gay person', lit. 'man woman'.

The following samples of Polari include (text 2) a short text taken from Burton (1979), and (text 3) a list of lexical items recognized as Polari collected from all available sources, both printed (listed in the bibliography) and at first-hand. No attempt has been made to indicate the different social or professional areas for which each item has been recorded, and only those of Romance origin, or possible Romance origin, are listed. They appear in a broad phonemic representation based upon my own hearing of the items in speech and my own reading of the written form assumed from English spelling conventions. The suggested etymologies are tentative at best.

The first sample is the Lord's Prayer in Lingua Franca (cf. the same text in Shelta, Romani and Angloromani, above):

1. Padri di noi, ki star in syelo, noi volir ki nomi  
 Father of us, who be in heaven, we want that name  
 di ti star saluti. Noi volir ki il paisi di ti star  
 of You be saluted. We want that the land of You be  
 kon noi, i ki ti lašar ki tuto il populo fazer volo  
 with us, and that You let that all the people do wishes  
 di ti na tera, syemi syemi ki nel syelo. Dar noi  
 of You in earth, same way that n-the heaven. Give us  
 sempri pani di noi di kada jorno, i skuzar per noi  
 always bread of us of every day, and excuse us  
 il kulpa di noi, syemi syemi ki noi skuzar kwesto populo  
 the sins of us, same way that we excuse DEM people  
 ki fazer kulpa a noi. Non lašar noi tenir katibo  
 that do sins to us. NEG let us have bad  
 pensyeri, ma tradir per noi di malu, perke ti tenir  
 thoughts, but lead us from bad, because You have  
 sempri il paisi e il forta e il gloria. Amen.  
 always the land and the strength and the glory. Amen.
2. As feely homies, when we launched young men  
 ourselves on the gay scene, Polari  
 was all the rage. We would zhoosh  
 our riahs, powder our eeks, climb  
 into our bona new drag, don our  
 batts and troll off to some bona  
 bijou bar. In the bar, we could  
 stand around polarying with our  
 sisters, varda the bona cartes on  
 the butch homie ajax who, if we  
 fluttered our ogle riahs, might  
 just troll over to offer a light.

6D 88

## THE IRISH TRAVELLING PEOPLE

A Resource Collection

Editor

Aileen L'Amie

The Resource Collection is held in the library of the  
 University of Ulster at Jordanstown,  
 Shore Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT37 4QB.

### CONTENTS

#### Volume

- 1 Early history (Parts A-D)
- 2 The Republic of Ireland 1951-81 (Parts A-H)
- 3 Northern Ireland (Parts A-F)
- 4 Britain
- 5 The United States of America
- 6 Shelta, the secret language (Parts A-D)
- 7 Folk tales and folk music
- 8 Education (Parts A-K)
- 9 Gypsy site provision in England and Wales (Parts A-F)
- 10 Index and Tables of Contents
- 11 Health and Welfare (Parts A-B)
- 12 Annual Reports (Parts A-C)
- 13 Republic of Ireland 1982-85 (Parts A-D)
- 14 Gypsies and other nomadic groups
- 15 Miscellaneous (Parts A-C)
- 16 Scotland 1958-87 (Parts A-B)
- 17 Gypsies and Travellers (A-D) (list of newspaper articles)
- 18 Ireland 1963-1992
- 19 Ireland 1994
- 20 Ireland 1993
- 21 Ireland 1995
- 22 Ireland 1996
- Supplements 1 and 2
- 23 Ireland 1997
- 24 The Traveller (Parish Newsletter) 1993 - Parts A and B
- 25 Interface Issues 9 (February 1993-) Parts A - C  
 Issues 9 - 13 (French version) Part D

The Resource Collection is held in the library of the  
University of Ulster at Jordanstown,  
Shore Road, Newtownabbey, Co Antrim BT17 0QB,  
Northern Ireland

Phone Number (44) 1232 366370

Fax Number (44) 1232 366849

Library classification reference number: 305.89149704

The full collection is held in the Librarian's office and is available for consultation by prior appointment. No part of it is available for loan but photocopies of specific articles can be supplied on inter library loan if exact references are supplied.

For further information contact Deborah Shorley at the above address or by email: [dc.shorley@ulst.ac.uk](mailto:dc.shorley@ulst.ac.uk)

REFERENCES

3. ákwə (*aqua, acqua*) n. 'water'. It *acqua*, LF *akwa* 'water'.  
 ásprow (*aspro, aspra*) n. 'male prostitute'. LF *aspro* 'money'.  
 bæť (*bat*) n. 'shoe'; v. 'shuffle or dance on stage'. See next item.  
 bæťriy (*battery*) v. 'knock' or 'strike'. It *battere* 'beat, strike'.  
 bæťriy ká:ziy (*battery carsey*) v. 'knock at a door'.  
 bá:kiy (*barkey*) n. 'a sailor'. It *barca* 'boat'.  
 béviy/bíviy (*bevvy, bivvy*) n. 'a drink'; v. 'to drink'. It *bev-* 'to drink'.  
 béviy owmiy (*bevvy omee*) n. 'a drunkard'.  
 bæđéyǵə (*bodega*) n. 'shop'. Spanish *bodega*. It *bottega* 'shop'.  
 bæǵéǵə (*bagadga, bagaga*) n. 'penis'. It *bagaggio* 'baggage'.  
 bímbow (*bimbo*) n. 'a dupe, a sucker'. It *bimbo* 'kid, infant, child'.  
 bínkow (*binco*) n. 'a kerosine flare'. It *bianco* 'white'.  
 biyn (*bene, ben*) adj. 'good'. It *bene* 'well'.  
 biynə (*benar*) adj. 'better'.  
 bównə/bównow (*bona, bono*) adj. 'good'. It. *buono*; LF *bonu*.  
 bównə nowčiy (*boner nochy*) 'good night'.  
 byéńək/byown (*beyonek, beone, beyong*) n. 'shilling'. It *bianco* 'white'.  
 čá:pə (*charper*) v. 'seek'. It *cercare* 'seek'.  
 čá:pərin ká:ziy (*charpering carsey*) n. 'police station'.  
 čá:pərin owmiy/šá:pə (*charpering omee; sharper*) 'policeman'. Cf. preceding items and English 'sharp'.  
 čá:və/čó:və (*charver, chauver*) v. 'have sexual intercourse'. Cf. Spanish *chava* 'girl', *chabacanada* 'a very vulgar expression'.  
 čá:vərin dónə (*charvering donna*) n. 'whore'.  
 čínkə/číkwə (*chinker, chikwa*) number 'five'. It *cinque* 'five'.  
 đěčə/děǵə (*dacha, deger*) number 'ten'. It *dieci* 'ten'.  
 dáwriy (*dowry*) adj. 'a lot of' e.g. *a dowry of acqua*. It *dare* 'give'.  
 diynə (*deaner*) n. 'shilling'. See next item.  
 dínəliy/dínəley (*dinarly, dinarlā, dinaly*) n. 'money'. Spanish *dinero* 'money'.  
 dólíy/dól (*dolly, doll*) n. 'smart and attractive young woman'. It *dolce*.  
 dónə (*dona, donna, doner*) n. 'lady, landlady'. It *donna* 'woman'.  
 dúwí (*dooe, duey*) number 'two' e.g. *duey saulty* '2d' [two old pence]. It *due* 'two'. See *sólta*, below.  
 fəb/fəbl (*fab, fabel*) adj. 'marvellous'. Spanish *fabuloso*, English *fabulous*.  
 fəčə (*faicha*) n. 'face' e.g. *fake the faicha* 'shave or apply make-up'. It *faccia*.  
 feyk (*fake*) v. 'make, do'. It *faccio* 'I make'.  
 féykmont (*fakement*) n. 'thing, doing, action'. See preceding item + English *-ment*.  
 fėrikədúwzə (*ferricadooza, ferricadouzer*) n. 'a knock-down blow'. It *ferire*.  
 fiyliy/fiylyə (*feele, feelier, feelia*) n. 'child'. It *figlie* 'children'.  
 fiyliyówmiy (*filome*) n. 'youth legally underaged'. It preceding item + *owmiy*.  
 fláwriy (*flowery*) n. 'lodgings, accommodation; house entertainment'.  
 fówǵəl (*fogle*) n. 'handkerchief'. It *foglia* 'leaf'; 'handkerchief' (slang).  
 ǵəm (*gam*) n. 'leg'. LF *gamba* 'leg'.  
 ĵənt (*gent*) n. 'money'. It *argento* 'silver'.  
 ĵǵə (*jogar, jogger*) v. 'play, sing, entertain'. It *giocare* 'play'.  
 ĵǵərin-owmi (*joggering omee*) n. 'entertainer'. See preceding item.  
 júwzay (*Jew's eye*) n. 'anything of value'. It.  
 kæmp (*camp*) v., adj. 'be excessive or showy', 'affect mannerisms of the opposite sex'.  
 kəťivə/ká:ťivə (*catever, kerverver*) adj. 'bad'. It *cattivo* 'bad'.  
 ká:niš (*carnish*) n. 'meat, food'. It *carne* 'meat'.  
 ká:niš-ken (*carnish ken*) n. 'eating house'. See preceding item + *ken* 'house'.  
 ká:tsow (*cartzo*) n. 'penis'. It *cazzo* 'thrust'.  
 ká:ziy/ká:zə (*carsey, karzy, carser*) n. 'house', 'lavatory', 'brothel'. It *casa* 'house'.  
 kəmisə/kəmišən/miš (*camisa, comission, mish*) n. 'shirt'. It *camisa* 'shirt'.  
 kəpələ (*kapella*) n. 'hat, cap'. It *capella*.  
 kəpələw (*kapello*) n. 'cloak'. It *capello*.  
 ká:ťivə-ká:tsow (*kerverver cartzo*) n. 'venereal disease'. It, see *kəťivə*, *kətsow*.  
 kwəťriyn/kwó:ťərin (*quartereen*) n. 'a farthing'. It *quattrino*.  
 kwó:ťə (*quater, quarter*) number 'four'. It *quattro* 'four'.

lǎliy/layl (*lallie, lyle*) n. 'leg'.  
 létty (*letty*) n. 'bed'. It *lette*.  
 léttyz (*letties*) n. 'lodgings, accommodation'. See preceding item.  
 língow (*lingo*) n. 'language', esp. 'foreign language'.  
 lǎŋ-dǎjǎ (*long dedger*) number 'eleven'. It *undici*.  
 mǎnjǎriy/mǎnjǎliy/nǎnyǎriy/nǎmyǎriy/jǎriy (*manjarie* etc.) n., v. 'eat', 'food'.  
 mǎnkiy (*manky*) adj. 'bad, poor, tasteless'. It *mancare* 'lack, want for'.  
 mǎzǎriyn (*mazarine*) n. 'mezzanine, platform below stage'. It *mezzanino*.  
 mǎdzǎ/mǎdzǎ (*madzer, medzer*) n., adj., 'half'. It *mezzo* 'half'.  
 mǎdzǎ-kǎrúwn/mǎdzǎ-zǎkǎruwn (*madzer caroon*) n. '2/6d' [two shillings and sixpence]. It *mezzo corona*.  
 mǎdzǎz/mǎdzǎz/mǎzǎz (*medzers, measures*) n. 'money'. See preceding item.  
 mǎk (*muck*) n. 'stage make-up'. It *macchia* 'stain'; English *muck*.  
 mǎltiy (*multy*) n., adj. 'many, a lot'. It *molto*.  
 nǎntiy/nǎntǎ (*nanty, nantee*) 'no, nothing, not, don't'. It *niente*.  
 nǎks (*nix*) 'no, not, don't'. Germán *nichts*.  
 nǎks-mǎnjǎliy (*nix mungarlee*) 'nothing to eat', 'no food'.  
 nǎwǎiy (*nochy*) n. 'night'. It *notte*, Spanish *noche*, LF *note*.  
 nǎbǎ (*nobber*) number 'nine'. It *nove*.  
 ówǎl/úwǎl (*ogle, oogle*) n. 'eye'. It *occhio* 'eye', English *ogle*.  
 ówmiy (*omee, omy*) n. 'man', 'landlord'. Creole *omi*, Portuguese *homem*, It *uomo*.  
 ówmiy-pǎlówniy (*omee-paloney*) n. 'male homosexual'. See ówmiy, pǎlówn.  
 ótǎ (*otter*) number 'eight'. It *otto* 'eight'.  
 pǎnǎm (*pannam, pannum*) n. 'bread'. It *pane*, Latin *panem*.  
 pǎ:kǎ (*parker*) v. 'pay'. It *partire* 'pay out'.  
 pǎlóriy (*polari, parlaree, parlary, palarie, parlyaree, panarly*) v. 'speak'; n. 'speech', 'language'. It *parlare* 'to speak'.  
 pǎló:vǎ (*palaver*) n. 'talk, argument'; v. 'to argue, discuss'.  
 pǎlówn/-iy (*polone, palone, paloney, pollone*) n. 'girl, young woman'. It *pollone* 'chick' (?).  
 pǎwǎiy (*pogy, poge*) n., adj. 'small, a little'. It *poco* 'little'.  
 pǎwǎiy-ǎkwǎ (*pogey acqua*) 'a little water'.  
 pǎnt/pǎnts (*pont, ponce*) n. 'a pimp'. Cf. Fr *pont* 'prostitute' and English *punk*.  
 pǎntiy (*ponte*) n. 'pound sterling'. It *pondo* 'weight' (calque).  
 pǎwnǎ (*poona*) n. 'pound sterling'. See preceding item.  
 pǎnk (*punk*) n. 'male homosexual'. Spanish *punto, puto* 'male prostitute'. See also *pont*, above.  
 rǎyǎ/rǎyǎ (*raih, riah*) n. 'hair'. Spanish *raya* 'parting in the hair'. Also possibly English backslang.  
 sǎvíy (*savvy*) v. 'know, understand'. LF *sabir*, 'know', 'understand'.  
 sey (*sa, say*) number 'six'. It *sei*.  
 sey-dúwiy (*say dooe*) number 'eight'.  
 sey-ówniy (*say oney*) number 'seven'.  
 sey-trey (*say tray*) number 'nine'.  
 sétǎ (*setter*) number 'seven'. It *sette* 'seven'.  
 skǎ:pǎ/skǎ:piy/skǎ:pǎliy (*scarper, scarpy, scapali*) v. 'flee'. It *scappare*.  
 skǎriyv (*screeve*) v. 'write', n. 'written material'. It *scrivere* 'write'.  
 sóltǎ/sóltiy (*salter, saltee, salty, saulty*) n. 'one penny'. It *soldi*.  
 sǎpǎlǎ (*suppellar*) n. 'hat'. It *suppellettile* 'household goods, fittings'.  
 stril (*strill*) n. 'musical instrument'. It *strillare* 'cry out, shriek'.  
 towbǎr-ówmiy (*toher omee*) n. 'landlord'.  
 tǎšǎrúwn/tǎšǎrúwn (*tosheroon, tusheroon, tusseroon*) n. '2/6d' [two shillings and sixpence].  
 Trey (*tray*) n. 'three'. It *tre; tray saultee* '3d' [three old pence].  
 úwnǎ (*una*) number 'one'.  
 vǎjǎriy (*vaggerie*) v. 'go, leave, travel'. It *viaggiare*.  
 vǎ:dǎ/vǎ:diy (*vardo, vardy*) n. 'a look'; v. 'see'. Venetian *vardia* 'a look'.  
 vǎwǎiy (*voche*) n. 'voice'. It *voce*.  
 wǎlǎp (*wallop*) v. 'dance on stage'. It *gallopare*.  
 wǎlǎpǎ (*walloper*) n. 'a dancer'. See preceding item.

## REFERENCES

- Acton, T. and Davies, G. 1979. Educational policy and language use among English Romanies and Irish Travellers (Tinkers) in England and Wales. In Hancock (1979) pp. 91-110.
- Adams, C. C. 1971. *Boontling, an American lingo*. Austin and London: The University of Texas Press.
- Arnold, F. S. 1898. Our old poets and tinkers. *Journal of American Folklore* xi, 42: 210-20.
- Barrère, A. and Leland, C. G. 1889. *A dictionary of slang, jargon and cant, embracing English, American and Anglo-Indian slang, Pidgin English, Tinkers' jargon and other irregular phraseology*. 2 vols. London: The Ballantyne Press.
- Baumann, H. 1887. *Londinismen: Slang und Cant*. Berlin and Schöneberg: Langenscheidtsche Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Bewley, V. (ed.) 1974. *Travelling people*. Dublin: Veritas Publications.
- Bonaparte, L. L. 1877. [Exchange of correspondence on the Lingua Franca], see Clarke.
- Burton, P. 1979. The gentle art of confounding naffs: some notes on Polari. *Gay News* cxx: 23.
- Butler, S. S. 1979. *Commentary on Macalister*. Privately-circulated essay. Dublin.
- Casey, D. 1980. A Gammon story. *Traveller Education* xv: 10-11.
- Cash, A. 1977. The language of the Maguires. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 4th series, 1, 3: 177-80.
- Chesney, K. 1972. *The Victorian underworld*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Clement, D. 1981. The secret languages of the Scottish travelling people. *Grazer Linguistische Studien: Sprachliche Sonderformen* xv: 17-25.
- Coates, W. A. 1971. The Lingua Franca. Papers from the Fifth Annual Kansas Linguistics Conference. Lawrence.
- Coelho, F. A. 1880. Os dialectos romanicos ou neolatinos na África, Asia e America. *Boletim da Sociedade de Geographia de Lisboa* ii, 129-96.
- Collier, B. 1977. On the origins of Lingua Franca. *Journal of Creole Studies* 1, 2: 281-98.
- Connors, M. and Acton, T. 1974. Have you the feen's gread nyocked? London: Romanestan Publications.
- Farmer, J. and Henley, W. 1890. *Slang and its analogues, past and present*. Reissued by University Books, New York, 1966.
- Fitzgerald, E. 1858-9. On ancient mason marks at Youghal and elsewhere: the secret language of craftsmen in the middle ages in Ireland. *Journal of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society* n.s., ii: 67, 384, 390ff.
- Friaroro, R. 1627. *Il vagabondo, overo sferza de' Bianti e vagabondi*. Venice: Signor R. F. Publ.
- Gmelch, G. and Gmelch, S. 1977. Ireland's travelling people: a comprehensive bibliography. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 4th series, 1, 3: 159-69.
- Grose, F. 1785. *Classical dictionary of the vulgar tongue*. London.
- Hadel, R. E. 1969. Modern creoles and Sabir. *Folklore Annual of the University Folklore Association* 1: 35-43. Austin.
- Hancock, I. 1973. Remnants of the Lingua Franca in Britain. *The University of Southern Florida Language Quarterly* xi, 3-4: 35-6.
- 1974. Shelta: a problem of classification. In DeCamp & Hancock (eds.) (1974) pp. 130-7.
- 1977. Recovering pidgin genesis: approaches and problems. In Valdman (ed.) (1977) pp. 277-94.
- 1980. Lexical expansion in creole languages. In Valdman and Highfield (eds.) (1980) pp. 63-88.
- Harper, J. V. 1969. *Irish traveler Cant: an historical, structural and sociolinguistic study of an argot*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of Georgia, Athens.
- 1972. 'Gypsy' research in the South. Proceedings of the Southern Anthropological Society iv: 16-24.
- 1973. Irish traveler Cant: its evolution and classification. Unpublished paper, privately circulated MS.
- and Hudson, C. 1971. Irish traveler Cant. *English Linguistics* v: 78-86.
- Hotten, J. C. 1864. *Slang dictionary*. London: Charles Camden Hotten.
- Lacroix, P. 1874. *Manners, dress and customs during the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance period*. London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd.

- L'Amie, A. (ed.) Forthcoming. *The Irish travelling people: a resource collection* (especially vol. vi, *Shelta, the secret language*, with a foreword by Séan Maher). Newtownabbey: Ulster Polytechnic.
- Legman, G. (pseud.) 1966. Introduction to Farmer and Henley (1890) pp. xxx-xciv.
- Leland, C. G. 1880. Shelta. *New Quarterly Magazine* n.s. iii: 136.
- 1882. *The Gypsies*. Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin and Co.
- Macalister, R. A. 1937. *The secret languages of Ireland*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Maher, S. Forthcoming. In L'Amie.
- Mayhew, H. 1851. *London labour and the London poor* iii (43), October. London: G. Woodsall.
- McElligott, P. 1808. Observations on the Gaelic language. *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin* i: 1-40. Dublin.
- Meyer, K. 1909. The secret languages of Ireland. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* n.s. ii: 241-6.
- Moran, M. 1980. The sooblik not bogged by the shades. *Traveller Education* xv: 9.
- Norwood, W. 1887. Tramp's language. *The Academy* 1 January: 11-12.
- Partridge, E. 1948. Parlyaree, Cinderella among languages. From his *Here, there and everywhere*. London: Hamish Hamilton. pp. 116-25.
- 1970. *Slang today and yesterday*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Reinecke, J., et al., (eds.) 1975. *Bibliography of pidgin and creole languages*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ribton-Turner, C. J. 1887. *History of vagrants and vagrancy, and beggars and begging*. London: Patterson Smith.
- Salgãdo, G. 1977. *The Elizabethan underworld*. London: J. M. Dent and Sons.
- Sampson, J. 1890. Some words of thief talk. *Journal of American Folklore* ii, 7: 301-6.
- 1891. Tinkers and their talk. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* ii: 204-21.
- 1908. A hundred Shelta sayings. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* n.s. 1: 272-7.
- Savage, E. B. 1895. Shelta. *Notes and Queries* 8th series, viii: 435-6.
- Seaholm, P. 1977. Shelta and the creole classification device. Unpublished MS. Austin, Texas.
- Stokes, W. 1872. *Goidelica*. London.
- Valdman, A. (ed.) 1977. *Pidgin and creole linguistics*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.
- Valdman, A. and Highfield, A. 1980. *Theoretical orientations in creole studies*. New York: Academic Press.
- Whinnom, K. 1977. The context and origins of Lingua Franca. In Meisel (ed.) (1977), pp. 3-18.
- Wilde, W. C. 1889. Some words of thief talk. *Journal of American Folklore* ii, 7: 301-6.

Since many readers may be unfamiliar with Shelta and Polari, some additional sources are given below as an aid to further study.

- Allingham, P. 1934. *Cheapjack: a novel*. London: Heinemann.
- Anon. 1830. *Dictionnaire de la Langue Franque ou Petit Mauresque*. Marseilles: Feissat and Demonchy.
- Clarke, H. 1877. [Exchange of correspondence with Lucien Bonaparte on the Lingua Franca] *Athenaeum* no. 2583: 545; no. 2585: 607-8; no. 2586: 640; no. 2587: 671-2 and no. 2588: 708.
- Coates, W. A. 1969. The German pidgin Italian of the 16th century Lanzichenecchi. *Papers from the Fourth Annual Kansas Linguistics Conference*, Lawrence.
- Connors, M. and Acton, T. 1974. *Mike's Book*. London: Romanestan Publications.
- DeCamp, D. and Hancock, I. (eds.) 1974. *Pidgins and creoles: current trends and prospects*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Emerson, P. H. 1893. *Signor Lippo: burnt cork artiste: his life and adventures*. London: Sampson and Low Co.
- Frost, T. 1875. *Circus life and circus celebrities*. London: Privately printed.
- Gmelch, S. and Langan, P. 1975. *Tinkers and travellers*. Montreal: Queen's University Press.
- Gordino, P. 1969. The walloper's polari. *TV Times* October 18th-25th. London.
- Greene, P. 1931-4. Irish tinkers or 'travellers'. *Béaloideas* iii: 171-86 (1932-1933); Further notes on tinkers' 'cant'. *Béaloideas* iv: 290-303 (1933-1934); Some notes on tinkers and their cant. *Béaloideas* iv: 259-63 (1933-1934).
- Hancock, I. (ed.) 1979. *Romani sociolinguistics*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Harper, J. V. and Hudson, C. 1973. Irish traveler Cant in its social setting. *Southern Folklore Quarterly* xxxvii, 2: 101-4.
- Hindley, C. 1876. *The life and adventures of a cheap Jack*. Brighton: Charles Hindley.
- Leland, C. G. 1886. A prehistoric language yet surviving in Britain. *The Academy* 759, 20 November, p. 346.
- 1891. Shelta. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* ii: 321-3.
- 1907-8. Shelta and the 'tinkers'. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* n.s., ii: 73-82.
- MacRitchie, D. 1901. *Shelta, the caird's language*. Inverness: Publications of the Gaelic Society.
- Manning, R. 1952. *English circus*. London: W. Laurie and Co.
- McCormick, A. 1906. *The Tinkler Gypsies of Galloway* [pp. x-xxiv, Cant vocabulary]. Dumfries: J. Maxwell and Son.
- Meisel, J. M. (ed.) 1977. *Pidgins-creoles: languages in contact*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Merrill, C. 1976. On the origin of the Lingua Franca. Privately circulated unpublished. MS.
- Meyer, K. 1891. On the Irish origin and the age of Shelta. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* ii, 5: 257-66.
- Rodgers, B. 1972. *The queen's vernacular*. San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books.
- Russell, A. 1914-15. Scoto-Romani and tinkers' cant: twenty sources arranged and edited. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2nd series, viii: 2-86.
- Seago, E. 1933. *Circus company: life on the road with the travelling show*. London: Putnam.
- 1934. *Sons of sawdust: with Paddy O'Flynn's circus in Western Ireland*. London: Putnam.
- Sinclair, A. T. 1909. The secret language of masons and tinkers. *Journal of American Folklore* xxii, 86: 353-64.
- Smith, E. F. 1931a. *Flamenco*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- 1931b. *Satan's circus and other stories*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- 1936. *Red wagon, a story of the tober*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- 1948. *British circus life, with additional material supplied by John Hind*. London: Hutchinson and Co.
- Ware, J. R. 1909. *Passing English of the Victorian era: a dictionary of heterodox English, slang and phrase*. London: George Routledge and Son.
- Whinnom, K. 1977. Lingua Franca: historical problems. In Valdman (ed.) (1977), pp. 295-310.
- Wicks, H. W. 1938. *The prisoner speaks*. London: Jarrolds.
- Wiedel, J. and O'Fearadhaigh, M. 1976. *Irish tinkers*. London: Latimer Press.

"Shelta and Polari" by Ian Hancock is reproduced with permission from *Language in the British Isles* (ed.) Peter Trudgill published by the Cambridge University Press (1984) pp.384-403.

# THE CRYPTOLECTAL SPEECH OF THE AMERICAN ROADS: TRAVELER CANT AND AMERICAN ANGLOROMANI

IAN HANCOCK

*The University of Texas at Austin*

THERE EXIST A NUMBER OF "languages of the roads," which have received passing mention in the literature over the years, but which until comparatively recently have not been the subject of scientific investigation. All of the documentation of these originates from, and describes, the situation in the British Isles; hardly acknowledged at all is the fact that these modes of speech also exist in anglophone territories overseas, such as Australia and New Zealand, The Republic of South Africa, and in Canada and the United States. Examined here is the origin and interrelationships of these "languages," and their current sociolinguistic status and use in the United States.

There are probably between 50,000 and 100,000 people in this country who refer to themselves as "Travelers," and who speak among themselves codes belonging to the type of language dealt with here. They consist of a number of distinct groups, the principal three being the Irish Travelers, the Scottish Travelers, and the Romanichals. It is to these three only that I am restricting my discussion. Typologically a number of other in-group registers in North America might be included here, such as that used by carnival employees (Elves 1977), confidence men (Maurer 1974) or itinerants (Flynt 1900), but these are purely socially defined populations, whose linguistic behavior is only superficially like that of the Travelers, although they frequently are all classified together in media reporting. The term *Traveler* does not now mean, necessarily, that someone so identified is constantly on the road; many Travelers live in sedentary homes and have done so for many years. There are long-established, settled Traveler communities in a number of states; one such, near Augusta, Georgia, is described in Harper (1977). Still other families may live in motorized trailers, some of them very elaborately appointed, and follow established routes in various areas of the country, undertaking such occupations as selling oilcloth or linoleum, painting roofs and barns, and so on.

All three of the principal groups of Travelers must be regarded as ethnic, not social, populations, on the basis of origins, patterns of de-

scent, the function of their respective dialects and so on. Of these three groups, only the Romanichals are Gypsies—using the word in its non-general sense—although like the Irish and the Scottish Travelers they also came to North America from the British Isles. While the original Gypsy language and core culture can be traced to India over a millennium ago, the specific histories of the other two groups are less abundantly documented or understood. A number of theories exist as to where these latter two groups and their dialects ultimately originated; suggestions ranging from the Picts to excommunicated clergy to families fleeing the potato famine to pre-Norman-Invasion British outlaws have been made at different times. Their respective dialects in North America contain, in addition to elements of Romani, features from Shelta, a related cryptolect based largely on Irish, and from Cant, a disguised English employed by those who lived outside the law in Britain from at least the late Middle Ages.

Today the ethnic speech of these groups consists of sets of non-English lexemes, to some extent overlapping but essentially distinct, within each of these three populations, in a wholly English grammatical framework. It is because of this I have referred variously to them as "languages," "dialects," and "modes of speech." They may in fact be typed synchronically simply as registers of English, but the nature of their individual developments does not parallel the development of any of the English regional dialects.

**IRISH TRAVELER CANT.** This register has drawn in the past upon a language known as Shelta for its cryptic lexical stock, but it has not yet been agreed upon whether it is a Shelta which has become diluted out of existence, or whether it has always been a kind of English which has drawn upon the Shelta which coexisted with it. Approaching its makeup **COMPONENTIALLY**, a term I shall come back to, the latter seems the more likely.

Shelta itself, at least as it was recorded a century ago, incorporated an extensive vocabulary of non-English items. While its actual lexical stock was not large, it expanded its semantic resources in a number of ways reminiscent of the same processes in pidgin languages. For example, 'summer' was expressed by *getch grimsher*, literally 'hot time', and 'sugar' by *innoch libis* 'sweet stuff'. In an earlier essay which also presents a more comprehensive discussion of Irish Traveler Cant, I reproduced the Shelta version of the Lord's Prayer by way of example (Hancock 1984b, 389):

Mwilsha's gater, swart a manyath, manyi graw a kradji dilsha's manik. Graw bi greydid, sheydi laadu az aswart in manyath. Bag mwilsha talosk minyart goshta

dura. Geychel aur shaaku areyk mwilsha geychas needjas greydi gyamyath mwilsha. Nijesh solk mwil start gyamyath, bat bog mwilsha ahim gyamyath. Diyil the sridag, taajirath an manyath gradum a gradum.

This kind of speech has been recorded from New England from the same period, but no present-day examples of the language are available. Instead, a register with a much higher English content (or lower Shelta content) is what investigators typically encounter. This is known as Cant, or The Cant; the same prayer, utilizing lexical items current today, would run as follows:

Our gathra, who cradgies in the manyak-norch, we turry kerrath about your moniker. Let's turry to the norch where your jeel cradgies, and let what your jeel shans get greydied nosher same as it is where you cradgie. Bug us eynik to lush this thullis, and turri us you're nijesh sharrig for the gammy eyniks we greydied just like we ain't sharrig at the gammi needies that greydi the same to us. Nijesh let us soonie eyniks that'll make us greydi gammy eyniks, but solk us away from the taddy.

While this would no doubt be understood by modern Cant speakers in the United States, it is quite contrived and not at all representative of the way the register is actually spoken in normal situations. In all of these dialects, such compositions, when they occur, are consciously devised linguistic exercises, though the creation of such "deep" speech does have a legitimate place in the speaker's repertoire.

Shelta's origins remain something of a mystery. There are two principal hypotheses as to its age, and two as to its origin: some scholars believe it to be several centuries old, and some think it has existed for less than two hundred years. And some have suggested that it was devised by unsophisticated tinkers, and others have said it was created by learned men—monks, in particular. Whatever its origins, it came to serve as a factor of linguistic cohesion for an oppressed population, identified by various names, whose descendants today are found in a number of English-speaking countries.

**SCOTTISH TRAVELER CANT.** The speech of the so-called Scottish Travelers may represent the oldest of the components in the three dialects being discussed here. The earliest texts containing Cant go back to the sixteenth century, and it is likely that its origins are to be sought even earlier. Wilde (1889, 306) believed that the dialect began developing at the time of the Norman conquest, when displaced Saxons took to the roads as outlaws and thieves and disguised their speech intentionally as a means of protection. This may have happened in the late Medieval period, but it is hard to imagine that it was necessary as early as the eleventh

century, when few Normans knew any of the dialects of English. A sample of Cant given by Copeland (1535) runs as follows:

Ynow, ynow, with boozy cove maimed nace,  
Tear the pattering cove in the darkman case,  
Docked the dell for a copper make.  
His watch shall feng a prounce's nob-cheat.  
Cyarum by salmon, and thou shalt peck my jerry  
In thy gan, for my watch is nace gear.

Another early sample is found in Dekker (1609):

If we heave a booth, we'll cly the jerk  
If we niggle or mill a boozing-ken;  
Or nip a bung that has but a win,  
Or dup the jigger of a gentry cove's ken,  
To the queer cuffing we bing.

An example of modern Cant, which was recorded in the British Isles in 1975 by Peter Kennedy and reproduced in Acton (1985, 19–20), is as follows:

I dicked a geddie playin' steamers,  
Oh my shannas, how be binged avree!  
I spied a young dillie bingin' doon the hellum,  
And some pourin', and nothin' to eat.  
As I binged near this dillie,  
She dicked and gloored at me.  
I said "shanish, shanish, manishi!  
Can you bing avree wi' me?"

AMERICAN ANGLOROMANI. *Angloromani* is a term used by linguists to distinguish this variety from the Romani also spoken in Britain which has retained its native morphosyntax and phonology. It is not a term used by its speakers themselves, who in the United States refer to it most commonly as *Romnis*. In Britain, where there is more awareness of the existence of the inflected dialect, it is called *posh'n'posh* (literally 'half and half') or *pogadi jib* 'broken language', terms not current in North America. I will not deal here with the status of inflected British Romani in the United States; a sample of it may be found in Brown (1929); at least two glossaries of the restructured variety as spoken in this country have also been published: Prince (1907) and Sinclair (1915). The current situation of the dialect in its country of origin is discussed by various authors in Acton and Kenrick (1984).

Essentially, Angloromani differs from its lexifier language (i.e., inflected, unmodified Romani) in having a far smaller core vocabulary, and an entirely English-derived phonology and structure. What follows is a

sample of Inflected Welsh Romani (taken from Smart and Crofton 1875, 200) and its English translation:

Kana me shomas tikno, saw i phurane foki rakarde tache phurane Romane lavaw. Ninai kek si sikle odia kana, sar and'i palane beshaw. Kana, i tarne foki n'astis te rakeren taches.

When I was a small child, all the old people spoke real old Romani words. People aren't taught like that now, the way they were years ago. Now, the youngsters don't know how to speak properly.

Here is the same passage in Basilectal English Romani (based upon Smart and Crofton 1875, 200, using Sampson 1926):

Kana sas mandi a tikno, saw o puro foki rokerde tacho puro Romani lavaw. Kek nanai si jaw siklo konaw, si sas beshaw dusta palal. Konaw, o tarno foki kek yon rokerena tacho.

Finally, the following translation of the same passage into the author's own Angloromani:

When mandi was a bitta chavvi, saw the pura foki rockered tacha pura Romani lavs. Foki ain't sikkered how to rocker these days like leddi used to dosta beshes ago. Tudivvus, the bitta foki kakker jins how to rocker kushiti.

ARRIVAL IN NORTH AMERICA. Hall (1915, 247) noted that "Thickly sprinkled with Gypsy names are the 'transportation lists,' 1787–1867, reposing on the shelves of the Public Records Office in London"; Brown (1929, 148) quotes verbatim from a Romanichal who told him that he remembered his grandfather telling him how his great-uncle fought for America in the Revolutionary War. From Cromwell's time on, large numbers of British Travelers, including the Irish Travelers, were transported to the Americas, though genealogical investigation such as that being carried out by Salo (1984) indicates that the largest period of immigration took place in the mid-nineteenth century. Simson (1865, 418–25) deals in some detail with the arrival of Romanichals and Scottish Travelers in North America; the arrival of Continental groups is documented in Hancock (1986).

An order dated 1654 sent to various Irish County Governors required them to "arrest all wanderers, men and women, and such other Irish within their precincts as should not prove they had a settled course of industry as yielded a means of their own to maintain them, all such children as were in hospitals or workhouses, all prisoners, men and women, to be transported" (Williams 1932, 12). "Henry Laurens, a Charleston slave dealer, claimed, 'I never saw an instance of cruelty to the Negro slaves in ten or twelve years' experience equal to the cruelty exerted

upon these poor Irish [transporters]" (quoted in Mannix 1983, 148). Further details of transportation are found in Beier (1985).

Many Irish came to the United States following the potato famine in the 1840s; this period of their history is dealt with in Sowell (1981, 17-42). According to Niles (1980, 21-22)

The immigration of Scots came generally later than that of the Irish. The bulk of the former were prisoners of war shipped over during the (Scottish) Civil War, but conditions in Scotland accounted for later transportations. . . . Between 1678 and 1685, more than 800 Scots were again sentenced to transportation; the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745 later furnished a number of Scots prisoners who too were shipped.

These shipments were to the West Indies, in particular Barbados, and to Virginia, though many of these individuals came into Carolina via Barbados as well. Some Travelers were transported simply for being Travelers, and their numbers may have been augmented by non-Traveler transportees who joined them; only a tiny fraction of those transported to the American colonies would have been Travelers before transportation; it is not easy to identify such people from names in the shipping lists.

The migration of Travelers into the United States has by no means stopped, and the distinctions among the different groups are many and complex. The earlier stock of Irish Travelers, known as Sawries, is in two separate groups centered in the Southeast and the South Midlands respectively, and both are different from a third group, consisting of the more recently arrived Irish Travelers, or "Greenhorns," who live principally in the North. There is little socializing among the three. The Scottish Travelers in Britain include Romanichal and non-Romanichal groups, although in this country that distinction doesn't seem to be maintained as sharply as in Canada, according to information provided by Lee (1969, 94) in his survey of different Gypsy groups in North America. It is generally accepted, however, that there has been a certain amount of intermarriage over the years, and that more or less Romani blood is represented in the histories of some Irish and Scottish Traveler families, and vice versa.

This earlier contact is evident in the dialects. Thus for Scottish Cant in Britain, Clement (1981, 20) found between twenty-five and thirty-five percent Romani-derived lexicon, and almost the same proportion is evident in this country. The phonology, however, differs in some respects from that of Angloromani, and there are items of Romani origin in Scoto-Romani, as Russell (1915) has called it, which have not been recorded in English Angloromani at all, suggesting a different earlier his-

tory for the Scottish Romani population. Irish Cant also contains a fair amount of Angloromani adoptions, and American Angloromani in turn contains some Cant words—*dancers* 'stairs', for example. It is evident, however, that this dialect mixing is far less common in North America than it is in the British Isles, and it is also the case that although speakers of each may use words from the other two dialects, they are usually quite well aware that they are doing so. An Irish Traveler will readily tell you that although he may use the word *kushti* 'nice', it is Romani and not Cant.

AGE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIALECTS. The arrival of speakers of inflected Romani in Britain, and hence their initial contact with English, probably took place in the late 1400s. The first reference to it was by Borde in 1547, and a few years later, in 1566, Harman referred to the Gypsies' use of "peddlars French or canting," which, he said, had become established some time during the previous thirty years. All the samples we have of this are in fact Cant and not any kind of Romani, and one possibility is that an earlier English Cant provided the model for all of the dialects being discussed here. We find in that dialect, for example, the use of nominal phrases functioning pronominally as early as Copeland (1535): *his watch* 'him', *my watch* 'I', and others such as *his nabs*, *his nibs*. The latter has survived into modern English, along with a few other Cant words like *booze*, *queer*, *rum*, *cheat*, and *gear*. In Irish Cant the same construction is found: *my jeel* for 'I', *your jeel* for 'you' and so on; Shelta has also created two pronouns on the same pattern: *mwilsha* 'I' and *dwilsha* 'you', from *mo* 'my' and *do* 'thy' plus *dyil* (which has no traceable source in Gaelic but which seems to mean something like 'self') plus *sha*, which is the Gaelic *-sa*, an emphatic particle following the noun possessed (cf. the Gaelic *mo mhac-sa* 'my son' [Dillon 1961, 49]). In Gaelic, *féin* means 'self', and forms such as *se féin* 'him-self', or more accurately 'he self', can occur as a nonreflexive pronoun, as in Hiberno-English 'himself did it', or 'will you give this to himself'. A parallel with the black English (and U.S. slang) use of *ass* ('arse' in British English) might tentatively be drawn: 'I fired his ass'; 'your ass is in trouble'. In the Igbo language, spoken in eastern Nigeria, *ike-m* 'my ass', *ike-gi* 'your ass', and so on, are common in colloquial speech for 'myself', 'yourself' (etc.). Scottish Cant *jeer*, incidentally, means 'backside', also one of the interpretations of the English Cant *jerry* (cf. *jerry can*). *Jeer* and *jeel* are phonologically very similar. This nominal construction used pronominally does not occur in Angloromani, although Scottish Cant has *my noggins*, *your noggins*, etc., the word *Noggins* or *Nawkins* in fact being one of the

names applied to the whole Scottish Traveler population here in North America. This is probably *noggin* in the sense of 'head', a word of untraced origin whose primary meaning is 'pot' (cf. French *tête* 'head' from Latin *testa*, 'pot'). 'My head' for 'me' is paralleled in some creoles, e.g., Haitian *m'ap tuye tet-mwen* 'I'll kill myself' (lit. 'I'll kill my head'). Given the occurrence of these constructions both in Gaelic and in English Cant, however, it cannot be determined conclusively on this basis alone which had the feature first, or whether indeed what we have is a case of parallel but independent development.

Essentially, as indicated above, each of the dialects is a set of non-English lexemes in the framework of English. The proportion of these in any given utterance differs according to circumstance, but in normal speech it is fairly low. A good many become part of the idiolects from the very beginning, and it is not uncommon for someone to discover only later that a word he has been using is not part of standard English. One seven-year-old girl recently translated *chore the wongur* as *chore the money*, not realizing that *chore* 'steal', was also Romnis; another Romanichal remembers that when he first attended school, he put his hand up and asked the teacher if he could leave the room to go and *muter* (i.e., 'urinate').

In situations where information needs to be passed cryptically, again only the key words will be changed, since a whole sentence in dialect would be likely to attract attention and perhaps cause suspicion. Many of the words give the auditory impression of being English, for example, *dampier*, *fig*, *kipper*, *bull*, *mandy*, *vasable*, *beeze*, and *crocus*. and when inserted into an English sentence they cause the listener to think only that he didn't quite catch what was said. This similarity, naturally, also serves as a source of puns and jokes within the Traveler community.

If the dialects are ever spoken with a high incidence of non-English lexicon, it is usually in situations where it is consciously the intention to do so. Individuals are admired for the extent of their vocabularies, and it is not unusual for speakers to play with the dialect and attempt dialect equivalents as a means of practice and diversion. Outsiders who have made efforts to learn any of these usually use too high a proportion of non-English words in their ordinary conversation, thereby sounding unnatural.

The extent of inclusion may be seen from the following three passages, one in each dialect, all of which were taken from the same issue of an evangelical newsletter produced by and for Travelers and distributed nationally. It is the Christmas story from St. Luke 2:20, and is given in the original spelling. In Angloromani, the passage is as follows:

And the goovel brought forth her first born chavvy and chivved the tickno in swaddling ejus and beshed him in a grais stall because there was keker room for them in the tan.

In Irish Traveler Cant this would be:

And the lacken brought forth her first born sobian and bugged the sobian in swaddling churk and bugged him in a manger because there was nejace room for them in the norch.

A Scottish Traveler Cant version:

And the manashe brought forth her first born chavvy and feeked the kinshun in swaddling tugs and feeked him in a grais stall because there was nocker room for them in the runk.

Speakers of Irish and Scottish Cant do not think in terms of their dialects being outgrowths of earlier, un-Anglicized languages, although this may in fact be true for Irish Cant. Again we are faced with determining whether (1) we are dealing with earlier discrete languages which have eroded to the point where they are now, or (2) whether they are registers which have evolved componentially; that is, were they always English but with an introduced component drawn upon from either a coexisting language—Shelta or Romani—or from a lexical stock—Cant? Speakers of Angloromani, on the other hand, do encounter individuals who have retained at least some inflected forms, usually frozen and un-analyzable, and who are familiar in addition with a sometimes quite extensive passive vocabulary. Because of the age of the language and because of its roots in inflected Romani, songs and expressions from an earlier time are retained which contain terms and constructions no longer part of the current speech. To illustrate, here is the sentence *Go and ask your sister* in the various forms along the continuum:

1. jaw te puches tire phenya
2. jaw ta puch tiri pen
3. jaw and puch tiri pen
4. jal and puch tuti's pen
5. jal and putch your pen
6. go and puch your pen
7. go and ask your pen
8. go and ask your sister

The first is in inflected British Romani; it incorporates a subordinated clause introduced with the complementizer *te*, the language having no infinitive mood, and expresses number, gender and case agreement. This is the kind of conservative dialect described by Sampson illustrating the speech of Gypsies in Wales at the turn of the century. The second

and third are typical of the way the same language is spoken today by a diminishing number in Britain; case agreement is not carefully maintained, and conjoined imperatives replace the "deeper" complex construction. English intrusion into the vocabulary, especially of nonlexical items, is apparent. The fourth could qualify as basilectal Angloromani; the verbs are invariable, and derive either from third person singular inflected forms (such as *jal*) or from imperatives (*puch*); the non-English pronouns in Angloromani are likewise derived from specific inflected forms in the source language; in this case *tuti* retains the form of the prepositional case, although not the case function; *tiri* is lost, the possessive being the invariable *tuti* plus English inflected *'s*. The phonemic distinction between aspirated and nonaspirated /p/ and /ph/ is lost since this is not a characteristic of English phonology. This is the kind of Angloromani often idealized in published sources, rather like the contrived version of the Lord's Prayer in ITC included above, but which is not typical of natural speech. The fifth, sixth, and seventh sentences are all possible, with the sixth and seventh most likely in an all-Traveler environment. The fifth might be used in the company of non-Travelers if for any reason the content of the message was to be kept from them.

The last, of course, is entirely English, and it is the fact that the discreteness (and the discreetness) of Angloromani, as well as of Irish and Scottish Traveler Cant, relies totally on their non-English lexicons, that lexical innovation remains productive. Speakers of all of these maintain that there is a way in their languages of saying anything at all without recourse to English words. Certainly there are equivalents for such contemporary items as *telephone*, *airplane*, *gasoline* and so on.

**FUNCTION OF THE DIALECTS.** These dialects serve two main functions: as a mark of ethnic identity and as a means of communicating in a way which is unintelligible to outsiders. The latter is nicely illustrated in a widely known joke:

Two Romanichals were adrift in mid-ocean on a raft, after their ship went down. The first lifted his arms to the heavens and cried "Oh Lord, if you get me out of this, I'll give you both my trailers, two piles of copper pipe and a whole set of Crown Derby." The second, hearing this, then raised his own arms and said "Lord, if you save *me*, I'll give you six trailers, ten piles of scrap, and seven sets of Crown Derby!" The first looked at him and said "Hang on, you haven't got six trai—", but the second cut in quickly and hissed "Kecker! Mandy's jeein' the gairal!"

Only the punchline is in Romnis and means 'Shut up! I'm kidding him along!'—even God isn't supposed to be able to understand the dialect.

It is evident that the need for such a protective device is diminishing,

and that the extent of the vocabularies of each is also diminishing, perhaps as a result—a fact which Harper (1969) discusses in some detail. But the value of each as a means of group identification continues to be a powerful factor in their survival and transmittance from generation to generation. With this changing emphasis on the reasons for maintaining these registers, the circumstances for doing so have also changed.

The situation in the case of Angloromani differs to some extent from that of the other two. First, although time has molded the Scottish and Irish Traveler communities into distinct peoples, each characterized by its own speech, customs, genealogy, and occupations, their respective cores of direct retention remain hard to identify, and they seem, on the basis of what we know, to have originated from the amalgamation of a number of both ethnic and social groups some time over the past few hundred years. The Romanichal population, on the other hand, has a strong sense of apartness from those who do not share Romani descent, and this is acknowledged by the other two populations, who refer to them as *Kippeens*, *Gypsies*, or *The English*, and who are not usually pleased to be associated with them—an attitude which is generally reciprocated by the Romanichal Travelers. This sense of apartness, probably more than any other factor, is typical of Gypsy populations everywhere, and may be the single most important criterion for identification: the notion that society is divided into those who are Romanies and those who are not. It does not matter that many Romanichals may have more non-Gypsy ancestry than Gypsy; what matters is that they are Gypsies, and the rest are not, and that includes the Irish and Scottish Travelers. From the outsider's perspective this might also serve as an important criterion of identification, since other Romani populations besides the Romanichals have come to settle in this country, and it is not uncommon to hear, for example, one group maintaining that members of another group are not "real Gypsies," whatever scholars know their shared ultimate history to have been. Perceptive classifications invariably differ from productive ones; while group A is different from group B in many and significant ways, both A and B are nevertheless not *gaje* 'non-Gypsies'. How this is interpreted, however, depends upon the very different perspectives of those doing the observing. One of the clearest boundaries separating different Romani groups in the United States is linguistic; because Romanichals cannot understand or be understood by speakers of Vlax Romani dialects unless both use English, socializing does not have a chance to develop. A group known as the Boyash, on the other hand, which shares the same immediate origins with the Vlax Romanies but who descend from those who were house-slaves during the

centuries of Gypsy slavery in southern Europe, and who as a result have lost the language, does socialize with the Romanichals, and cases of intermarriage between members of the two groups are not unusual. Acquisition of the dialect of the Romanichals is also found among the Boyash, some of whom have even adopted Romanichal surnames. Romanichals and the Boyash are often confused by the Vlax Rom, who may refer to both as *Boyash* indiscriminately; the Vlax, on the other hand, are called *Ragheads* or *Turks* by the Romanichals, and *Bonnajejs* by the Boyash.

The populating of North America, with the huge diversity of ethnic and national groups who have come there to live, has caused Travelers to become lost in the crowd. Americans tend to be very color conscious, and it is hard for them to think of minority groups except in terms of race and complexion. More than once it's been said that the Gypsies' plight might receive more sympathetic attention if they had green skin.

Americans have also been fed a very imaginative diet of romantic nonsense about Gypsies, and most would not be able to recognize a genuine Gypsy if they saw one. As long ago as 1865, Simson commented upon the "very erroneous" popular perception of the Gypsy (8), and his remarks, by and large, still hold true today. The word *Gypsy* itself is often used as though it described a kind of behavior; Irish and Scottish Travelers are referred to as *Gypsies* in the press not because of what they actually are, but because of how they are perceived to behave; and yet

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the [Irish] Travelers in no way consider themselves to be Gypsies. Newspaper reports that refer to the Travelers as Gypsies are highly resented. In fact, such reports have had a definite negative effect with regard to the Travelers' openness with outsiders desiring to write about them . . . "to call us Gypsies is to misrepresent us." [Harper, 1977, 38-39]

Members of a troupe of non-Gypsy actors who arrived in San Francisco in the summer of 1985 in horse-drawn carts were called "Gypsies" in the local press (Rowlands 1985), although Gypsies don't travel in horse-drawn carts in this country, and less than two percent do in Britain. It is the strength of this stereotype which protects the real population, and with so many non-Traveler Americans on the roads and in the KOA Camps in their Winnebagos, it is easy to understand why Travelers remain invisible to the rest of the population. Too, Travelers will seldom reveal their identity in their contacts with the non-Traveler population.

This invisibility has also brought about a certain relaxation of attitudes towards protecting the community. In Britain, the situation is sharply distinct: Travelers, whether Romani or not, are a persecuted minority which must travel from government reservation to government reservation and who will be fined or jailed if they stop anywhere in between. In

May, 1985 in Yorkshire, one municipal council sought a court injunction to make it illegal for Travelers to trespass within city limits—a move which the press called "a policy of apartheid." Such anti-Traveler legislation exists also in the United States, but it is not often enforced. When it is, it is usually against the more recently arrived, more identifiable Continental Gypsies. Harper (1977, 64) writes of the profound effects one such law had on traditional means of livelihood for the Travelers; passed in the State of Georgia, it read in part:

Upon each company of traveling horse-traders, or traveling Gypsies . . . engaged in trading or selling merchandise or livestock of any kind, or clairvoyant, or persons engaged in fortune-telling, phrenology, or palmistry, \$250 [is] to be collected . . . [from those who] live in tents or travel in covered wagons and automobiles, and who may be a resident of some country or who reside without the State, and who are commonly called traveling horse traders and Gypsies. [Georgia Acts and Resolutions, 1927, Part I, Title II, §56, p. 73]

Something should be said about the secrecy of these dialects and the ethics involved in discussing them in print. Most of their speakers have a very protective attitude about revealing details of their speech to outsiders or about admitting that such dialects even exist. Obviously, if the dialects were to become too well known, their whole function as cryptotlectal registers would be invalidated. Almost all of the examples given here are already somewhere in print, and therefore already available to anyone interested enough to look for them. It should be added, however, that speakers are still quite easily able to disguise the content of their speech even in the presence of outsiders who have learned more or less of their dialects from printed sources. An increasing number of works on Travelers is being written by Travelers themselves, and this is as it should be. The British and Foreign Bible Society has published a number of scriptures in some of these dialects, and at least one publishing house has produced several collections of materials, including word-lists and transcribed oral literature. Various scholarly treatments of the status and form of these dialects exist, and on the sociological background of their speakers. A number of these have been included in the References.

## REFERENCES

(Including works cited in the text, and further sources on the Travelers)

- Acton, Thomas. 1985. *Gypsies in Great Britain: A Report for the Council of Europe*. London: Silver.
- Acton, Thomas, and G. Davies. 1979. "Educational Policy and Language Use

- Among English Romanies and Irish Travellers (Tinkers) in England and Wales." Hancock (1979), 91-110.
- Acton, Thomas, and Donald Kenrick, eds. 1984. *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus: the English Romani Dialect and Its Contemporary Social, Educational and Linguistic Standing*. London: Romanestan Publications.
- Ainsworth, Harrison. 1851. *Rookwood*. London: Chapman and Hall. (Ch. 5 contains extensive examples of Cant, with discussion.)
- Beier, A.L. 1985. *Masterless Men: the Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Betts, Paul. 1974. "Scottish Tinkers." *Observer Magazine* 7 April: 56-58.
- Bewley, Victor. 1974. *Travelling People*. Dublin: Veritas.
- Borde, Andrew. 1547. *The First Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge*. London.
- Brown, Irving. 1924. *Gypsy Fires in America*. New York: Harper.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1929. "The Gypsies in America." *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 8: 145-76.
- Cahalane, D.C. 1904. "The Gypsies." *New England Magazine* May: 321-30.
- Clement, David. 1981. "The Secret Languages of the Scottish Travelling People." *Grazer Linguistische Studien: Sprachliche Sonderformen* 15: 17-25.
- Copeland, Robert. 1535. "The Hye Way to the Spytall Hous." Hazlitt (1864), n. pag. Quoted in H. Bauman, ed. *Londonismen: Slang und Cant*. Berlin: Schöneberg, 1887, xxxviii.
- Dekker, Thomas. 1609. *Lanthorne and Candle-light*. London.
- Dillon, Myles. 1961. *Teach Yourself Irish*. London: English Universities P.
- "An Early Gypsey." 1894. *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 2: 100.
- Elves, Hazel. 1977. *It's All Done with Mirrors*. Victoria: Sono Nis.
- Flynt, Josiah. 1900. *Tramping with Tramps*. London: Unwin.
- Gatlin, George. 1925. "Nomads of our American Highways." *Travel* June: 12-15.
- Grierson, G.A. 1909. "A Note on Professor Prince's Article on the English-Romany Jargon." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29: 232-35.
- Hall, George. 1915. *The Gypsy's Parson*. London: Low, Marston.
- Hancock, Ian, ed. 1979. *Romani Sociolinguistics. International Journal for the Sociology of Language* 29. The Hague: Mouton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984a. "Romani and Angloromani." Trudgill (1984), 367-83.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984b. "Shelta and Polari." Trudgill (1984), 384-403.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984c. "The Social and Linguistic Development of Angloromani." Acton and Kenrick (1984), 89-122.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. *Gypsy Slavery and Persecution*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen.
- Harman, Thomas. 1566. *A Caveat for Common Cursetors*. London.
- Harper, Jared. 1969. *Irish Traveler Cant: An Historical, Structural and Sociolinguistic Study of an Argot*. Master's thesis, U of Georgia.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1973. "Irish Traveler Cant: Its Evolution and Classification." Unpublished essay.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1977. *The Irish Travelers of Georgia*. Diss. U of Georgia.
- Hazlitt, William C. 1864. *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England*. London: J.R. Smith.
- Jones, Alexander. 1834. "American Gypsies." *American Journal of Science and Arts* 26: 189-90.

- Kennedy, Peter. 1975. *Folk Songs of Britain and Ireland*. London: Cassell.
- Kenrick, Donald. 1979. "Romani English." Hancock (1979), 111-20.
- Lee, Ronald. 1967-69. "The Gypsies in Canada." *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 46: 38-51, 47: 12-28, 48: 92-107.
- [MacRitchie, David?]. 1891. "Transportation of Gypsies from Scotland to America." *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2: 60-62.
- MacRitchie, David. 1894. *Scottish Gypsies Under the Stewarts*. Edinburgh: Douglas.
- Mannix, Daniel P. 1983. *The History of Torture*. New York: Dell.
- Maurer, David W. 1974. *The American Confidence Man*. Springfield: Thomas.
- McCormick, Andrew. 1907. *The Tinkler-Gypsies*. Edinburgh: Menzies.
- Muller, Edwin. 1941. "Roving the South with the Irish Horse-Traders." *Reader's Digest* 39: 59-63.
- Niles, Norma. 1980. *Provincial English Dialects and Barbadian English*. Diss. U of Michigan.
- Prince, J.D. 1907. "The English-Romany Jargon of the American Roads." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 238: 271-308.
- Rehfishch, Farnham, ed. 1975. *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers*. London and New York: Academic.
- Ribton-Turner, C.J. 1887. *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy, and Beggars and Begging*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Rowlands, Penelope. 1985. "Gypsies of the Theater." *San Francisco Times-Tribune*, 8 Aug.: C1-2.
- Russell, A. 1915. "Scoto-Romani and Tinkler's Cant." *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 8: 1.
- Ryan, George E. 1967. "The Irish Travelers." *Ave Maria* 18 Mar.: 16-18.
- Salo, Matt. 1984. "Romničel Economic and Social Organization in Urban New England, 1850-1930." Sixth Annual Meeting of the North American Chapter of the Gypsy Lore Society. New York, 24-26 Feb.
- Sampson, John. 1926. *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales*. Oxford UP.
- Simson, Walter. 1865. *A History of the Gypsies: With Specimens of the Gypsy Language*. London: Sampson, Low, Son. and Marston.
- Sinclair, A.T. 1915. "An American-Romani Vocabulary." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 10: 727-38.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1917. "American Gypsies." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 21: 299-315.
- Smart, Barth C., and H.T. Crofton. 1875. *The Dialect of the English Gypsies*. London: Asher. Rpt. Detroit: Gale, 1968.
- Sowell, Thomas. 1981. *Ethnic America: A History*. New York: Basic.
- Trudgill, Peter, ed. 1984. *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge UP.
- Vogel, Albert. 1976. *Gypsies in America: A Bibliography*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico Technology Application Center.
- Wilde, W.C. 1889. "Some Words of Thief Talk." *Journal of American Folklore* 2: 301-06.
- Williams, J.J. 1932. *Whence the 'Black Irish' of Jamaica?* New York: Dial.

"The Cryptolectal Speech of the American Roads: Traveller Cant and American Angloromani" by Ian Hancock is reproduced with permission from *American Speech* Vol.61 Part 3 (1986) pp.206-220.

The following extracts are reproduced from Encyclopaedia of Ireland

(ed) Victor Meally, published Alan Figgis, Dublin 1968, pp.115-117.

## IRISH SCRIPTS

**OGHAM:** Even the earliest Irish script, Ogham, which is at least as early as the fifth century A.D., implies familiarity with the Latin alphabet. Ogham uses twenty letters, each formed of a group of strokes on either side of the angle of a stone, or crossing it. Most Ogham stones were discovered in southwest Ireland. Ogham is suitable only for short inscriptions.

## IRISH AND ITS VARIETIES

The Celtic languages were *Gaulish*, which died out at the beginning of the Christian era; *Goidelic*, from which are descended Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx; and *Britannic*, from which are descended Welsh, Cornish and Breton. Cornish became extinct in the eighteenth century; Manx survived into the first half of the present century.

It is not possible to say when Celtic-speaking people first came to Ireland, but it was probably some time during the first millennium B.C.

The oldest form of the language of which records survive is *Old Irish*, and belongs to the period A.D. 600 to A.D. 900. The ancient Irish at first had a form of writing known as *Ogham* (see supra) which, while based on the Latin alphabet, consisted of strokes cut in stone or in wood. The Latin letters came to Ireland with Christianity, in the fifth century, and apart from *Ogham*, the language has been written in some form of these letters ever since.

Old Irish, as found in written records, was a homogeneous standard language, written by a small learned class. It is an extremely difficult language, especially in its morphology (accidence), and is not therefore intelligible to readers of Modern Irish. A knowledge of Modern Irish is, of course, a help in acquiring the older language, and indeed many words, which have changed neither spelling nor meaning, are readily recognizable to an Irish speaker, e.g. *bó* (cow), *capall* (horse), *lár* (mare), *fol* (head of hair), *glún* (knee), *cruth* (shape), *ball* (member), *bláth* (flower), *maith* (good), *mór* (big).

During the period c. 900-c. 1200, the Old Irish system broke down and was replaced by a less rigid form of language, known as *Middle Irish*. This was a time of rapid change during which the language seemed to have no literary standard. At the end of this period, *Early Modern* (or *Classical*) *Irish*, a new literary form, appears. This new standard literary form was cultivated in the Bardic Schools from about 1200 to 1650. These Bardic Schools came to an end with the collapse of the old Irish order in the seventeenth century, and with them, the knowledge of the Classical language.

**SCOTTISH GAELIC AND MANX.** It is well known that Irish was introduced to Scotland by the Dál Riada from North-Eastern Ireland, who invaded Scotland towards the end of the fifth century, settled there, and gradually spread their power and language over the country. It is not known when Irish speakers first settled in the Isle of Man. Up to the tenth century the language of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man was the same—Common Gaelic. From that date on, Scottish and Manx (Eastern Gaelic) began to diverge from Irish (Western Gaelic). In the course of time Scottish and Manx themselves developed independently of each other, with the result that by the time Bishop Phillips translated the Book of Common Prayer in 1610, Manx had become a separate language. Phillips devised a spelling for Manx, which is roughly based on the sound-system of English, and which, in spite of its clumsiness and inadequacy, has been used ever since.

The literary language of Scotland and Ireland remained the same down to the breaking up of the Bardic Schools in the seventeenth century, but the spoken language had been diverging for some centuries before that date. Scottish Gaelic now differs greatly from Irish, in sound-system and grammar. Although both languages have a large vocabulary in common, loanwords from Old Norse and from English, which are not known in Irish, occur in Scottish Gaelic, and loanwords from French and English, which are unknown in Scottish Gaelic, occur in Irish. As well as such differences, Old Irish words have survived in one language which have been lost in the other. On the other hand, some of the dialects of Scottish Gaelic are quite close to Northern Irish dialects, and the dialect spoken in Rathlin Island could be described as a mixture of Irish and Scottish Gaelic.

**MODERN DIALECTS.** In the early days of the Language Movement at the end of the nineteenth century, although some writers advocated the revival of Classical Irish, 'the speech of the people' was eventually accepted as a literary medium. By this time, local dialects had developed, and, since English had penetrated in between Irish-speaking areas, these dialects were growing in diversity. No one dialect preserved the whole of the Irish language. The elements that did survive often differed from one area to another.

When 'the speech of the people' came to be written, features which were considered too local, or which seemed too far removed from the traditional grammar, were avoided, and what was more important, the spelling of Classical Irish was on the whole faithfully adhered to. The living speech had developed in many directions since this spelling had been first established in the Bardic Schools. For example, in certain positions the fricative consonants *dh*, *gh*, *mh*, *bh*, had become silent, and preceding short vowels had either been lengthened or diphthongized, according to the dialect, e.g. *leabhar* (book) > *L'aur*, *L'oir*; *adhlamud* > *a:mud*, *aimud*; *righin* > *rain'*, *ri:n'*.

The stress accent was traditionally on the first syllable in Irish, and it still is, for the majority of simple words. This accent is a strong one, which normally reduces all short unstressed vowels to a neutral vowel, e.g. *capall* > *kap:l*. In certain categories of words in Munster dialects, the accent was shifted to the second or third syllable, and the vowel of the first syllable was reduced to a neutral vowel or elided, e.g. *scadán* (herring) > *sgá'da:n*; *bacach* (lame) > *ba'kax*; *corrán* (sickle) > *kra:n*; *salach* (dirty) > *slax*.

On the other hand, these same categories developed in another way in Ulster dialects, where the second syllable was shortened, or if before *-ch*, was retained as a clear vowel. Thus *scadán* > *'sgadan*; *bacach* > *'bakax*, in Ulster, have the same clear vowel in both syllables. In Connacht, the development was different again, e.g. *'sgada:n*, *'bakax*.

Modern Irish resembles other western European languages, such as English and French, with regard to the development of the noun declensions, in so far as it has a considerably reduced number of case inflections, compared to the older language. A special form for the accusative has been lost, and in most dialects a special form for the dative and dual. This results in many nouns now having only two forms, one singular and one plural, e.g. *file* (poet), pl. *filí*, which formerly had five different forms.

Another modern development is the tendency to combine plural endings, with the consequent development and spreading of new long plurals, such as *-acha(f)*, *-anna(f)*, *-iocha(f)*, *-ionna(f)*, *-(t)racha(f)*, etc. Certain of these endings are found in all dialects, but not always in the same words. Others are peculiar to one dialect, for example *-asta*, *-aistí* (e.g. *laethasta*, *áraistí* in Munster); *-iúcháí* (e.g. *cleitiúcháí*, *bonnúcháí* in Connacht); or *-ideacha* (e.g. *ceathaideacha* in Ulster).

Although the word-store of any dialect has not yet been fully recorded, it can be said that there exists a large vocabulary which is common to all dialects. On the other hand, there are many words which are now confined to a single dialect, and many others whose meaning varies from one dialect to another. This divergence arises mainly from the fact that the diminishing Irish-speaking areas have been separated from each other by English-speaking areas, with the result that only a portion of the common word-store now survives, and that that which does survive is not the same in any two areas. Differences occur in many of the everyday words and phrases, for example, 'How are you?' is ordinarily *Conas taí?* in Munster, *Cén chaoi bhfuil tú?* in Connaught, and *Goidé mar atá tú?* in Ulster.

## LANGUAGE.

507. Panjab—Kat or Kath in place-names is (?) Kafir.—Is not the word *kát* or *káth* known in the Panjab as the equivalent of *háfir*; and is it not occasionally prefixed to names of ancient sites?—*M. R. H.: England.*

[I have never met with this prefix. Possibly it is a mistake for *kat* a fort, which in the Persian construction is prefixed to the name, while in the vernacular construction it is affixed. Thus *Kot-Kángra*, *Kot-Kamália*. Frequently both forms are found, as *Kot Mithan-Mithankot*. There are several old Hindú forts, or even natural hills resembling forts in appearance, known by the name of *Káfir Kot*.—*M. L. D.*]

508. Deccan—Sarpan—Old man—"Old stick"—A derivation.—An old man in the Deccan is called "*sarpan*" or firewood. Perhaps this idea originated the saying of calling a man an "old stick," though the English have lost the allusion to the pyre.—*Ghain: Khandesh.*

509. India—Gipsy tongue—Shelta.—The following extract from Mr. C. G. Leland's paper on "The Original Gipsies and their Language," read at the Oriental Congress at Vienna, is specially interesting with reference to Mr. Grierson's recent researches into the language of the Gipsies and its connection with those of modern India.

"Three or four years ago there was probably not an educated man in all Great Britain who was aware of the existence in that country of the very singular Celtic language known as 'Shelta,' which is peculiar to tinkers, but which is extensively understood and spoken by most of the confirmed tramps and vagabonds. It is not mentioned in the Slang Dictionary; the English Dialect Society has ignored it; and thus far I believe that I am the only man who has collected or published a word or a vocabulary of it. I doubt if I ever took a walk in London, especially in the slums, without meeting men and women who spoke 'Shelta'; and I know at this instant of two—I really cannot say promising—little boys who sell groundsel at the Marlborough Road Station who chatter in it fluently.

"As 'Shelta' is somewhat mixed with Gipsy, and as the two languages are often spoken by the same persons, especially the half-blood Romanis, I will here give a brief account of my discovery of it. Once at Bath, England, I met a tramp who told me that Romani was being supplanted by a kind of language like Old Irish, which was difficult to learn. A year after, in company with Professor Palmer, I met with another vagabond who told us that the language was called 'Shelta.' He knew about a hundred words of it, which we wrote off at his dictation. This vagabond was a well-educated man. Two years after, in America, I found an Irish half-blood gipsy tinker who spoke 'Shelta' quite perfectly, and also Irish, Gaelic and Welsh. He was absolutely certain

that 'Shelta,' while it was pure Celtic, was quite separate from the other tongues. Its pronunciation is strongly Gaelic; its words are, however, generally unlike it, though it has roots in common. My informant, who very much enlarged my vocabulary, himself pointed out differences between the terms in 'Shelta' and Old Irish. According to his account, the tinkers had from very ancient times always been a closely allied clan, intermarrying and speaking this peculiar language. Their unity began to break up 'about the time the railroads came in.' Since then 'Shelta' has declined. There are very few now living who can speak it perfectly.

"It has been very ingeniously suggested that as the tinkers of Great Britain may be the descendants of the old bronze-workers, so their tongue may have come down to us from prehistoric times. Discoveries have shown that the early bronze-smiths were nomadic, that they went about from village to village, making and selling new objects and buying up old and broken ware to melt and re-mould. The bronze-worker's craft was closely connected with that of the jeweller, in most cases both were exercised by the same person. His wares were immensely valuable in those days, out of all proportion to the present worth of such objects. Therefore, the bronze-smiths must have travelled in large bands for mutual protection. Nothing is more likely than that they formed, in time, a community with distinct laws and language. Nor is it improbable that this was transmitted to the tinkers. It takes a long time for men to form a distinct class with a separate tongue. The Celtic tinkers of England are unanimous in claiming for their class or clan a very great antiquity. Now when we find in the same country two nomadic classes of men, pursuing the same calling of working in metal, though separated by a long historical interregnum, we may rationally surmise that they had a common origin and a common language.

"I have introduced these observations of 'Shelta' in the hope that they will induce some sound Celtic scholar to take up the subject and investigate it thoroughly. Many curious discoveries await the man who will do this. There are still living in Scotland many old families of 'Tinklers,' as they are called, who retain many traditions of their ancestors. If these were thoroughly examined much might be learned."

[This subject will be referred to again later on.—Ed.]

It is to be hoped that Mr. Leland and others may be induced to contribute further words, as no sound judgment can be formed as to the extent or antiquity of this dialect unless more materials are rendered available for its study.—*H. T. Crofton, in the Academy.*

568. India—Shelta—Gipsy Language.—See Vol. IV, note 509. I know nothing of Mr. Leland's list, but I am glad to supplement Mr. H. T. Crofton's with some examples that occurred to me in learning Romany more than thirty years ago.

I.—PERSONS.

- Ges'timer* } a magistrate or justice.
- Póhkonus* }
- Tom'-pat*, a person.
- Króker*, a doctor.
- Múmpér*, a tramp.
- Múskro*, a policeman.
- Moyt*, a daughter.
- Fóky*, people.
- Bóshárdy*, a pregnant woman.

II.—ANIMALS.

- Képhyl* } a horse.
- Prád* }
- Grás* }
- Késsig*, a mare.
- Méilor* } an ass.
- Móison* }
- Mor'ghen* } a rabbit.
- Shúshei* }
- Mátchticóve*, a cat.
- Lágprat*, a fish.
- Dun'nux*, a cow.

III.—MONEY.

- Bar* } a pound.
- Kutár* }
- Kúttér* }
- Finnif*, a five-pound note.
- Schúfel Finnif*, a bad ditto.
- Kúller* } a shilling.
- Kálor* }
- Bool, Bul*, a crown.
- Vonger*, money.
- Wedj*, silver.

IV.—CLOTHING & FURNITURE.

- Krees*, a saddle.
- Blácky*, a tin vessel.
- Hóver* } a clock.
- Yewr* }
- Shipsy*, a basket.
- Kurru*, a quart.
- Sóopen*, a watch.
- Blátchy*, coal.
- Crab-shells*, shoes.
- Stamp-drawers* } stockings.
- Olivers* }
- Tróopers*, breeches.
- Mill-togs*, shirt.
- Teil* } hat.
- Star'dy* }

V.—FOOD.

- Tinglers*, onions.
- Spréddum*, butter.
- Spénton*, cream.
- Póplars* } broth.
- Sim'my* }

VI.—PLACES & THINGS.

- Rom-kain*, a gentleman's house.
- Veil*, town or village.
- Kúshimér*, an ale-house.
- 'Attam*, a church.
- Grannum*, a barn.
- Fóvos*, a fair.
- Humble-hump*, a hayrick.
- Plinmer*, a stone.
- Jigger*, a door.
- Stigger* } a gate.
- Klapper* }
- Gatter*, rain.
- Graft*, work.

VII.—SEASONS.

- 'Attam-day*, Sunday.
- Mul-divvus*, Christmas.
- Stretchor*, a year.

VIII.—OTHER WORDS.

- Jilt*, to shut.
- Ex.—"Jilt the jigger" (shut the door).
- Hatch*, to remain.
- Ex.—"Hatchi kootshi" (stop a little longer).
- Fake*, to play.
- Ex.—"Fake the boshamingy" (play the fiddle).

I offer these as samples of this Mumpers' or Tramps' talk, which I think Mr. Borrow somewhere called "The Germania." The word "Shelta" I never heard.—*T. W. Norwood: in the Academy.*

## A Glossary of Market-traders' Argot

words obtained from Grace Lilian Ashton of Boston, Lincolnshire

### Patrick O'Shaughnessy

The following words, none of them Standard English (or where the form is, the usage is hardly so), were gathered from the speech of Mrs Grace Lilian Ashton (1899-1975) of Boston, Lincolnshire, during her widowhood, the last four years of her life.

Mrs Ashton, nee Wilson, was born in Grimsby and moved to Boston when still a child. In 1921 she married Charles Ashton, a Boston market-trader, and with him "stood the markets" in Boston, Fakenham, King's Lynn, Lincoln, Sleaford and, less regularly, St Neots, Spalding and Spilsby for nearly fifty years, selling linoleum, carpets and sweets. During World War Two, when these items were in short supply, they sold kitchenware as well. In later years they dealt exclusively in carpets.

Some of the words here were obtained in the first instance from younger members of the Ashton family (Mrs Ashton was the compiler's mother-in-law), but the validity of such words was in every case confirmed by Grace Lilian.

Mrs Ashton's vocabulary included a small number of words belonging more properly to Lincolnshire dialect. These have been omitted from the present list; common slang likewise.

The words given here are in use, for the most part, wherever market-stalls or fairgrounds are to be found in England, for market-traders and fairfolk travel far and wide, but it is not pretended that the list represents the entire argot. Market-traders are not usually ready to divulge their language to outsiders, for obvious reasons.

Many of Mrs Ashton's words will be found in E Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, but not always with the same connotations. Some of her words are in common use outside the market fraternity, but market people will invariably claim that they had them first. This claim is demonstrably true in the case of the word "gazump", which suddenly became popular quite recently when house prices rocketed. A few words have crept into local usage in the Boston area (the same thing has happened, no doubt, in and around other market towns): "divvy" (daft) is an example.

The compiler leaves the etymology of these words to the more learned, though in some cases it seems self-evident. The spellings adopted are, it is hoped, such as make pronunciation plain without recourse to phonetics.

### B

- bat, n. price
- belker, v.i. cry, weep noisily
- bellows, n. pl. "Give him the bellows" = "Get rid of him"
- bevy, n. beer
- bevyken, n. beerhouse
- bevy-merchant, n. one who drinks heavily
- bible-thumper, n. one who imposes upon the kind-hearted by hawking from door to door what purports to be his dead mother's bible — such is his pretended extremity. He relies upon the generosity of his dupes to return the book to him immediately after purchase.

- blinks, n. pl. spectacles
- blink-fencer, n. seller of spectacles
- bluer, n. spendthrift, one who "blues" his money
- bogy, n. difficult customer; government official; tax-man
- brick, v.t. defraud. "He was bricking me, so I gave him the bellows"
- bricker, n. defrauder
- briskets, n. pl. breasts, bosom
- bunce, n. profit

### C

- cadey, n. hat; headgear
- carzy — see karzy
- charlie, n. hump (spinal deformity)
- charver — see Romany-charver
- chat, n. thing, object
- chavvy, n. child
- chinger, v.i., v.t. grumble, complain; deter (a potential customer)
- chingerer, n. grumbler; one who deters potential customers
- chockers, n. pl. feet
- chore, v.t., v.i. steal, thieve
- clatter, v.t., v.i. smack, hit. "I clattered him". "Clatter on to the chavvy".
- clatters, n. pl. smacking. "Give the chavvy his clatters".
- clobber, n. pl. clothes
- clod, n. penny
- coey, n. thing, object
- conk, conkie, nn. nose
- coshes, n. pl. punishment
- crack, v.t. say. "Crack nix".
- crocus, n. quack-doctor
- crowie, n. old woman
- cushty, adj. good; of good quality; enjoyable

## D

daffies, n. pl. alcoholic liquor  
 dancers, n. pl. stairs  
 dashes, n. pl. smacking. "Give the chavvy his dashes".  
 date, n. buttocks  
 deaner, n. shilling  
 dell (on to), v.t. chastise. "Dell on to him".  
 dick, n. lock. "Take a dick at the monnisher's briskets".  
 dick, v.i. look. "Dick at the gorger's conkie".  
 dipper, n. pickpocket  
 divvy, adj. daft  
 dorrick, v.t., v.i. tell fortunes  
 dorricker, n. fortune-teller  
 drag, n. street. "In the main drag".  
 dropsy, n. gratuity; bribe  
 duggies, n. pl. breasts, bosom

## E

earwig, v.i. eavesdrop  
 earwigger, n. eavesdropper  
 essence, n. excessive profit-margin. "Put the essence on" = "Charge excessive prices".

## F

fake, v.t. take (a gratuity or a bribe). "Fake the dropsy and crack nix".  
 flash, v.t. show. "The monnisher's flashing her strides".  
 flatty, n. person who is not a market-trader  
 flim, n. five-pound note  
 forgy, n. dimwit  
 forgy, adj. dimwitted  
 funk, v.i. smell, stink. "He funks". "The ken did funk".  
 funky, adj. smelly, stinking. "Nanty! Here comes Funky Willie".  
 Funky-Willie, n. smelly man, stinkard. "Nanty! Here comes the Funky-Willie".

## G

gaff, n. market; fair  
 gammy, adj. of poor quality; lame. Gammy gear: inferior goods. "Gammy on his chockers".  
 gázúmp, n. practice of overcharging; swindle. "They've got the gazump on".  
 gázúmp, v.t. charge (somebody) an excessive price; swindle. "You've been gazumped".  
 gazumper, n. one who charges excessive prices; swindler  
 gear, n. goods; belongings, clothes  
 gee, n. The big gee: high praise; flattery; "red-carpet" treatment. "I gave him the big gee".  
 gen (with hard g), v.i. snap, bicker, "Genning and snarling at one another".  
 gilly (with hard g), n. man  
 gimmer (with hard g), n. gossiping woman  
 glimmer, n. eye  
 gorger, n. man  
 gormalised, adj. stupid  
 graft, n. work  
 graft, v.i. work  
 grafter, n. worker; trader. "Market-grafter".  
 granny, n. pretext, "blind", "front".  
 grasshopper, n. customer who inspects one line of goods after another without buying anything.  
 grubber, n. workhouse

## J

jawl, v.i. decamp  
 jeer, n. buttocks  
 jiggers, n. pl. stairs  
 joag, n. shilling  
 jole, v.t. hit, strike  
 joskin, n. country lad, yokel  
 juck, juckle, nn. dog. Often used disparagingly of a man — "the old juck".  
 Juck's Lips, Juckle's Lips, quarrelsome or disagreeable man, "Snarlygob"

## K

karzy, n. lavatory, w.c.  
 ken, n. house  
 kinger (with hard g), n. a good customer, especially at the end of an otherwise bad day

## L

lagger, n. lavatory, w.c.  
 lakes, adj. stupid  
 lell, v.t. prosecute, summons. "They lellled him"  
 loaver, n. money

## M

mace, v.t. owe (money to). "He maces me a flim".  
 mannigant, n. conceited person  
 meg, meggie, n. ha'penny  
 messer, n. one who puts the stallholder to a great deal of trouble without buying anything  
 milly, n. shirt  
 mimmies, n. pl. alcoholic liquor  
 mingra, n. policeman. "Nanty! The mingra's screwing you".  
 mockers, n. pl. curse; bad luck. "He put the mockers on me".  
 moey, n. face, countenance  
 monnicker, n. name (of person)  
 monnisher, n. woman  
 mort, n. woman  
 mullier, n. murderer  
 mully, v.t. murder  
 mung, v.t. ask. "Mung the messer to scarper".  
 mush (to rhyme with *push*), n. man; mouth  
 muskra, n. policeman

## N

nanniking, pres. part. fooling; larking about. "Nanniking off" = "Showing off".  
 nanty, injunction. say nothing; keep it quiet; stop it; beware.  
 nark, n. awkward customer; one with no intention of buying  
 nark it, injunction: say nothing; keep it quiet; stop it; beware  
 nark on, put the. discourage; put a stop to. "That put the nark on his gazump".  
 needle, n. awkward customer; one with no intention of buying  
 nicker, n. pound note  
 nix, n. nothing  
 Noah's Ark, n. one who accompanies a customer but deters him or her from buying  
 nolified, noly (to rhyme with *holy*), adjs. simple-minded  
 noly, n. simpleton  
 nurry, n. head

## O

ockier, n. liar  
 ocky, n. lie, untruth  
 ogg, n. shilling

## P

pagger, v.t. break, smash, wreck. "That's paggered it".  
 parney, n. water; rain; urine; urination. "I'm going for a parney".  
 parney, v.i. rain; urinate  
 peeever, n. public house  
 pester, v.t., v.i. pay  
 peter, v.i. weep  
 pitch, v.t., v.i. sell by mock-auction  
 plawt, n. boot; shoe  
 poke-bouncer, n. one who, by sleight of hand, appears to put money or valuables into a paper bag, which he then twists and offers for sale  
 pony, n. trash  
 pony, adj. trashy  
 poppy, n. money

## Q

quaver, v.i. dither. "The crowie was quavering about".

## R

rabbit, v.i. talk (too much). "She goes rabbiting on".  
 radgepot, n. idiot  
 radgy, adj. idiotic (of a person)  
 ready-ied, past part. made ready; bribed. "The place was ready-ied for us".  
 "He's got to be ready-ied".  
 riddle, v.t., v.i. steal (from) by pocketing the takings, or part of them.  
 "He was riddling the till".  
 riddler, n. one who pockets the takings, or part of them; dishonest assistant  
 ringerbarry, n. customer who brings goods back for exchange or refund  
 rock, v.t., v.i. understand  
 rocker, v.t., v.i. speak. "Do you rocker Romany?"  
 Romany-charver, n. gipsy stallholder  
 rook, v.i. grumble, complain

S

scarper, v.i. go away. Often in the imperative  
 scran, n. food  
 seran, v.i. eat  
 screeve, n. motor-car  
 screw, v.t. look at. "Screw the monnisher's cadey".  
 shack, n. tramp, vagrant  
 shice, n. nothing. "He did it for shice," i.e. without charge  
 Shice McGregor. personification of slack trade. "Shice McGregor's about today".  
 shuffler, tramp, vagrant  
 skimmished, adj. drunk, intoxicated  
 skimmisher, n. one who drinks heavily  
 sky, n. pocket  
 slag — see slinks  
 slat, n. crown (five shillings). Half a slat: half-crown  
 slinks and slags, nn.pl. loafers and layabouts  
 smother, n. good stuff; material of quality; coat; overcoat  
 snuff-bottle, n. anything shocking, mortifying or destroying, e.g. a tax-demand.  
 One takes an animal to the vet for a sniff of the snuff-bottle, i.e. to be destroyed. "That put the snuff-bottle on him/it" = "That put an end to him/it". Cp. "to snuff it".  
 sprarzer, n. sixpence  
 steever, n. shilling  
 stewmer, n. difficult customer; naughty child  
 strides, n. pl. knickers, drawers; pants; trousers; slacks

T

tap, v.t. ask (person) for a loan  
 tapper, n. borrower  
 ten-ogg, n. ten-shilling note  
 thrummer, n. threepenny bit  
 tober, n. market-stall; stallholder's or caravan site; rent for stallholder's or caravan site  
 tosheroon, n. half-crown  
 trash, v.t. frighten

Treacle-Stick, n. (used contemptuously for) Social Security (formerly National Assistance).  
 "Slinks and slags on the Treacle-Stick". The term is now in common use amongst Boston market-traders. The late Charles Ashton, husband of Grace Lilian, claimed to have invented it. He would explain that once "they" were on the Treacle-Stick, "they" stuck.

tricks, n. pl. "He's in his tricks" = "He's in a bad temper".  
 tuggies, n. pl. clothes  
 tun, n. hundred  
 tup, v.t. butt, strike with the head

V

vardo, vardy, nn. gipsy caravan  
 vardy, n. opinion, point of view, "oar". "He would have to put his vardy in".

W

wafy, adj. of poor quality  
 wylocks, n. pl. children

Y

Yappy, n. idiot  
 yappy, adj. idiotic  
 yock, n. eye  
 yogg, n. fire (in the hearth)

A Glossary of Market-traders' Argot

Supplement

Words, and further connotations of words already in the main glossary, recalled by younger members of the Ashton family since the death of Grace Lilian. None of her three surviving children is a market-trader, though they helped on the stalls in their youth.

banter, v.t. "Banter him down" = "Prevail upon him to lower his price."  
 blow-out — same as bellows, q.v.  
 bunce, v.t. overcharge (especially an eager or affluent customer)  
 charver, v.i. copulate. v.t. (denoting the male function) copulate with. "He charvered her."  
 charver, n. coition; girl, woman; person.  
 chorer, n. thief  
 corn-fake, n. corn-cure  
 crapper, crappareena, nn. lavatory, w.c.  
 crocus, n. fair-weather stallholder who appears for a while when winter is over  
 crummy, n. flea  
 crummy, adj. flea-infested  
 flash, n. display; publicity stunt  
 gobby, gobshite, nn. stupid person  
 gobby, adj. stupid  
 joint, n. market-stall  
 lager, n. chamber-pot; commode  
 lily, n. ear-trumpet. Used figuratively: "Get your lily at the keyhole" = "Eavesdrop".  
 mace, v.t. obtain (goods) under false pretences or without paying; swindle. "He maced me".  
 mace, on the, under false pretences; without paying. "He got it on the mace" = "He maced it".  
 macer, n. confidence trickster; swindler  
 quaverer, n. ditherer, vacillating customer  
 rooker, n. grumbler; dissatisfied customer  
 scawp, v.t. hit, strike  
 skimmish, v.i. drink alcoholic liquor, "booze". "He's out skimmishing".  
 snuff-box — same as snuff-bottle, q.v.  
 weigh-up, n. assessment of a customer's affluence and of his eagerness to buy.  
 "I gave him the weigh-up; then bunced him".  
 wig, v.i., v.t. eavesdrop; listen to (person or persons) surreptitiously.  
 "Is he wiggung us?" Cp. earwig  
 wigger, n. eavesdropper. Cp. earwigger

'A Glossary of Market Traders' Argot' by Patrick O'Shaughnessy is reproduced with permission from Lore and Language 2, 3 (1975) pp. 24 - 30.

## A Glossary of Market-traders' Argot

(LORE AND LANGUAGE II, 3, 24-30)

### Corrections and Second Supplement

Patrick O'Shaughnessy

#### Corrections to Main Glossary

dell (on to), v.i. chastise. "Dell on to him".  
dick, n. look. "Take a dick at the monnisher's briskets."  
monnisher, n. Young woman  
mort, n. older woman

#### Corrections to Supplement

crummy, n. louse  
crummy, adj. infested with lice; disgusting

#### Second Supplement

Words, and further connotations of words already in the main glossary or the supplement, obtained from collateral members of the Ashton family (of Boston, Lincolnshire) still active as market-traders.

blacksmith on, put the. lock out. "He came home late from the bevyken and the mort put the blacksmith on him."

bluer, n. a racehorse that loses. Cp. bluer in main glossary

bogy, n. curse, bad luck. "He put the bogy on me." Cp. bogy, mockers, in main glossary.

bottle, n. buttocks. Cp. bottle and glass.

bottle, v.i. smell, stink. "Some of them slinks and slags in the bevyken don't half bottle."

chattamaranta, n. large object not immediately identifiable; thing.

Cp. chat in main glossary.

chinger, v.t., v.i. scold. Cp. chinger in main glossary.

chordy (tshordy), adj. stolen. chordy gear = stolen goods. Cp. chore in main glossary, chorer in supplement.

chuvvied up. infested with fleas.

- chuvvy, n. flea

cock and hen. ten pound note

- dash (on to), v.i. chastise. Cp. dashes and dell in main glossary.

down, n. inside information. Cp. low-down.

drop, v.t. tip; bribe. "He tried to drop the mingra." "I dropped him a flim." Cp. dropsy in main glossary.

fakems, n.pl. quack medicines; pinchbeck; counterfeit goods; disguised trash; make-up.

fakems on, put (or get) the. offer trash for sale as valuable merchandise; disguise defects; apply cosmetics. "She's got the fakems on" can mean either "She is selling disguised trash" or "She has plenty of make-up on."

fence, v.t., v.i. sell. Cp. blink-fencer in main glossary.

forggified, adj. dimwitted. Cp. forgy in main glossary.

funk, n. stink. Cp. funk in main glossary.

- funkum, n. scent, perfume.

funkum, n. stink, fart. Often in the plural. "Who's made the funkums?" "Who's done the funkums?"

fuzzball, n. fart. "Someone's dropped a fuzzball." Often in the plural. "Who's made the fuzzballs?"

gazer, n. pedlar with tray of goods, especially one who stands in the street.

geared up, dressed up. "She was all geared up like a dog's dinner."  
Cp. gear in main glossary.

- gee (with soft g), n. accomplice in the crowd. See windbag-blower below.  
Cp. gee in main glossary.

gelp (with hard g), n. money. Cp. gelt, gilt.

- Gillpots, Mr Gillpots (with soft g). sobriquets for a drunkard.

glim, n. eye. Cp. glimmer in main glossary.

grine, griny, groiny, nn. ring (for a finger)

gryer, n. horse.

jeer, n. defecation. "He's gone for a jeer."  
Cp. jeer in main glossary.

jeercase, n. buttocks. "I'm not going to lick his jeercase."

kettle, n. watch (timepiece)

lag, n. urination. "I'm going for a lag."

laggareena, n. lavatory, w.c. Cp. lagger in main glossary,  
crappareena and lagger in supplement.

lakesy, adj. stupid. Cp. lakes in main glossary.

Madame Misharty. personification of sales-talk, exaggerated claims,  
wild predictions, blarney, flattery and claptrap. "Don't give me  
the Madame Misharty." (Perhaps she was a fortune teller).

- mag, v.i., v.t. talk.

- mang, mung, vv.t. ask; 'tap' (for a loan). "Mang him for a fiver."  
Cp. mung in main glossary.

megs, n. pl. spectacles. Cp. meg in main glossary.

mob-handed. in a group, with a crowd. "The bogy came mob-handed."

moody, v.t. put into a good humour by means of ingratiating talk;  
wheedle; flatter; humour.

moody-merchant. one who can 'tell the tale'; smooth-tongued fellow;  
flatterer.

- mugsnatcher, n. photographer operating at a fairground, in the street,  
or at the seaside.

nanty, nunt, adjs. silent, reticent. "He kept nanty about it" = "He  
kept quiet about it." Cp. nanty in main glossary.

nixy, n. nothing. Cp. nix in main glossary.

nixy, interjection. it's rubbish; it's not worth bothering with;  
nothing doing.

pen and ink. pain or suffering, especially when inflicted as a punishment  
or in revenge. "He didn't half give me some pen and ink." Cp. pen  
and ink in Cockney rhyming slang, where it means stink.

peter, n. bag, valise.

- punter, n. bidder at a mock-auction or at a run-out (see below),  
or at a windbag-blower's swindle (see below), etc.

radgified, adj. idiotic (of a person)

radgy, n. idiot. Cp. radgepot, radgy, in main glossary.

- run-out. A run-out worker is one who appears at a market or fair, works  
a quick swindle and then runs out, i.e. disappears. A run-out or  
run-out game has come to mean a particular type of swindle, a  
kind of auction at which an article is offered at, say, £1. When a  
punter (see above) has paid for it but not yet received it, he is  
offered a second article of the same value, together with the one  
he has just bought plus his pound note, for £2.50. If he is gullible  
enough, he may be persuaded to buy a third article, together with  
those he has already bought plus the £3.50 he has handed over,  
for £5. And so on.

shushy, n. chicken.

slang, n. licence; permit.

- snorer, n. difficult customer. Cp. stewmer in main glossary.

snuffler, n. veterinary surgeon. Cp. snuff-bottle in main glossary,  
snuff-box in supplement.

toe-rag. dirty thing; dirty person, rubbish. "I'm not fencing that toe-rag."

- trasher, n, thriller (film, novel, etc). Cp. trash in main glossary.

weed, at the. thieving. "He's been at the weed again."

- windbag-blower. He had a number of paper-bags, envelopes or packets  
containing articles of little value — collar studs used to be the staple  
items. When he had attracted a sufficient crowd, he showed them  
the contents of the packets and then proceeded to insert in a few  
of them an item of greater value — a watch or a cigarette lighter.  
Next, he jumbled up all the packets and invited bids of half-a-crown  
for any one. Several accomplices (gees) disposed amongst the crowd  
bid immediately. The windbag-blower 'sold' them packets that he  
knew to contain the articles of greater value. The gees' cries of  
delight on opening their packets persuaded punters (see above) to  
part with their half-crowns.

yak, n. watch (timepiece)

yorer, n. egg.

'A Glossary of Market-traders' Argot' (second supplement) by  
Patrick O'Shaughnessy is reproduced with permission from  
Lore and Language 2, 8 (1978) pp. 20-4.

Republished term paper  
The University of Texas  
Austin 1977

Jan Hancock

Shelta and the Creole Classification Device

Per Seaholm

Unpublished term paper  
The University of Texas  
Austin 1977

© Ian Hancock

## Shelta and the Creole Classification Device

Per Seaholm

The problem of creole language classification stems from the inherent weakness of the criterion that traditionally defines the term. The definition of creole as a nativized pidgin is a static concept forced onto a subject whose proper focus is language change. The result has been expedient categorization without prior examination of the classification device. A formidable challenge to the definition is the language discovered by Charles Godfrey Leland in 1876, and named Shelta. Its widespread existence at that time is evidence today of the success of Irish itinerants in the establishment of a secret language. As such it raises an additional question regarding the accuracy of the criterion for language as a device to facilitate communication. On the contrary, Shelta's original purpose was communication prevention in out-group contact situations. Its origin may be considered anti-language. But there is nothing to be gained from denying its existence as a language. Ian F. Hancock in "Shelta: A Problem of Classification" reports:

Shelta is spoken today in the British Isles and the Irish Republic, Canada, and the United States, and reportedly in Australia and the Republic of South Africa. The total number of speakers is unknown, but probably does not exceed 30,000.

Similarly, its non-pidgin origin should exclude it from creole classification. Shelta does, in fact, exhibit most of the characteristics associated with creole languages. As Hancock explains, "...the linguistic sequence of the stages of creolization does obtain for Shelta, but the social criteria do not; no two groups of people were involved...."<sup>2</sup>

Shelta's challenge to the traditional creole classification device is best revealed by:

1. A discussion of the conflicting theories of Shelta's origin,
2. An analysis of the structure of the language, its grammar and syntax, and
3. An examination of the processes of word formation and lexical expansion.

Once examined in the context of its own evolution, an attempt at classification can be made.

1. Research on the Shelta tongue must rely heavily on the 1937 publication, The Secret Languages of Ireland, written by Irish professor of Celtic archaeology, R.A. Stewart MacAlister. He has reported on the history of the discovery of Shelta, its grammar, syntax, phonology, and lexicon. This is in addition to the texts he supplied, part of which he has transcribed to a more accurate phonological representation. As preface to this material the reader is acquainted with the underground culture of Ireland. One is confronted with the subjective feelings that MacAlister expresses toward these people. First, he is sympathetic in his analogy between the "vagabonds" of ancient Ireland (500 - 900 AD) and the "untouchables" of India. Later he calls them "miserable creatures . . . [that] must have been a nuisance, if not an actual menace, to ordered society."<sup>3</sup> An objective view of his description of Irish society leads one to conclude that as a class disinherited by religious, economic, and legal systems, criminality was simply established family tradition. Later generations were resourceful in the establishment of service occupations — tinsmithing, fortunetelling, knife grinding, umbrella mending, spray painting. Other ways of subsistence have been livestock trading, carpet vending, manufacture and sale of clothes pins, sieves, and knick-knacks, piping, begging, swindling, and petty theft.<sup>4</sup> Today, itinerant people still form the lower class in Ireland and suffer the same discrimination.

The composition of the itinerant class was affected by several historical phenomena. MacAlister stresses religious upheavals. The rise of Christianity in the 5th century brought the fall of the pagan religion and the closing of the druidic schools. The "poets" of these institutions spread throughout Ireland. Many sunk to the lower class taking with them a knowledge of the Celtic language and powers of the supernatural. In the 16th century, much of the academic world in Ireland was marginalized by the closing of the monasteries by Henry VIII. In connection with these events MacAlister remarked, "All such changes are bound to upset somebody's arrangements."<sup>5</sup> He imagined a contact situation and used this in his theory of Shelta origin.

As he described it:

We picture [the displaced scholars] gradually dropping to the level of the vagrants . . . : living their out caste life, and acquiring their criminal cunning . . . ; and to this superadding their own equipment of scholarship, . . . . The broken-down scholar, the unfrocked and dilapidated clerk . . . , can be dangerous allies of the criminal classes. Among other gifts which they can bestow must be counted effective means of secret communication; such as would be far beyond the inventive powers of their uneducated associates.

Leon Uris, in his bestselling novel Trinity, reflects on the positive aspects of the traveling scholars:

Our daddies had gotten their schooling from the hedge teachers . . . , who traveled from village to village and held classes on the sunny side of the hedges. They were one part poet, one part Celtic scholar, and one part regular teacher with the mission of keeping alive the ancient language and folklore. When they vanished from the scene, the Irish tongue vanished with them . . . .

Queen Elizabeth consolidated British power over Ireland in the early part of the 17th century. The Irish language was banned along with everything else Catholic in the 18th century. In the context of foreign domination and Crown policy of native language suppression there is added utility to alter-native forms of communication. This is the third anti-language factor in the development of Shelta.

The placement of Shelta in its historical perspective is a point in controversy. In the years immediately following its discovery a date of origin was estimated around 1000 AD. Leland told Sampson in 1899 :

It is one of the awfully mysterious arcana of human stupidity that there should have existed for a thousand years in Great Britain a cryptic language—the lost language of the bards — which no scholar ever heard of . . . . For even yet there is hardly a scholar who knows of its existence — of the fifth British Celtic tongue! <sup>8</sup>

Sampson's research involved informant John Barlow, an elderly tinker he met in Liverpool, who believed his native Shelta the language of generations for the last eight hundred years.<sup>9</sup> Both Sampson and Meyer published analyses to substantiate their claims that Shelta was descended from early Irish Gaelic. They were able to show how Shelta words were derived from Gaelic words via modification such as sound substitutions and metathesis. This evidence they claimed pointed to a pre-1200 AD origin of the language. <sup>10</sup>

McAlister's familiarity with the historical background

4  
McAlister's familiarity with the historical background allows him to choose when the development is most likely. He opts for a theory of more recent origin, one that follows the introduction of English to Ireland. A structural analysis supports this side of the question. McAlister's view is as follows:

In idiom and construction Shelta is far more English than Irish. It has been fashioned into its present form by persons whose major language was English, pronounced according to Irish-English phonesis, though they admittedly possessed an extensive vocabulary of words in common use in Irish. <sup>11</sup>

In regard to formation of words, specifically, consonant de-aspiration, McAlister maintains that if we are to accept this as proof of antiquity (Shelta's developing at the time Irish consonants were hardened) the language would then be prehistoric. This was inconceivable to him. So he explained the sound change by reasoning that the founders of Shelta "worked it out from written [*italics in the original*] forms of Irish: they disregarded the dots of lenition, and so pronounced the words with the consonants hardened." <sup>12</sup>

Lexical throwbacks to ancient languages are attributed to the wayward scholars claimed by McAlister to have been instrumental in the invention of Shelta. Or perhaps they are frozen segments of earlier secret tongues passed down through generations. To summarize the relativity of secret languages in Ireland McAlister concludes that it is the tradition of secret communication in the Irish underworld that is important rather than any particular form. <sup>13</sup>

McAlister's treatment of Shelta is comprehensive and as precise as possible given his prejudice toward the lower classes and non-standard speech. This is sure to have effected his thoughts on the language. It underlies his assumption that itinerants lack linguistic creativity and would need scholarly assistance in the construction of a language. Conversely, McAlister was perceptive in suspecting that the enthusiasm of Leland, Sampson, and Meyer in the discovery of Shelta had influenced their estimation of its age. Two recent articles have continued the debate. Hancock's article says simply that the evidence is conflicting: "Neither view has been proven conclusively." <sup>14</sup> In "Irish Traveler Cant", Harper and Hudson flatly reject the antiquity theory. Their explication of Shelta's English based grammar and syntax

is adequate reason for this. Where Hancock does not deny the role of scholars in the construction, Harper and Hudson do. However, the latter fail to document their assertion.

2. Commenting on the structure of Shelta, Harper and Hudson explain that "the grammar of Shelta was the grammar of the dialect of English spoken by men like John Barlow." Such a statement drastically oversimplifies the situation. An examination of the grammar and syntax will demonstrate definite English features, especially where articles and morphemes are concerned. However, Shelta exhibits non-English features as well. Many are from Irish and Irish influenced English. Many are native to Shelta itself. John Barlow was by his own admission a native speaker. Interference in his acquisition of English may be assumed. Thus, Harper and Hudson not only oversimplify the structure, they do it by means of an ETIC statement. To accurately represent Shelta's structure a complete grammar is presented here. It is derived directly and indirectly from McAlister's book. Direct reference is to his various sections on parts of speech. Other points come from the vocabulary section he provides. From this part it was possible to deduce paradigms of the language.

The words Irish and English to the right of a word, morpheme, or pattern indicate the source. Native Shelta contributions are not noted as such; but, may be presumed from the lack of a given source.

Indefinite Article	Irish English	Used in free variation as in GloX nid'es a gloX... man [is] not a man...
Definite Article	Irish English	Irish masculine article 'an' 'in' English
Genitive	Irish English	Irish, coalescence of masculine 'an' and feminine 'na'. Usage follows Irish rule: of two nouns in genitive relationship, only one can have an article In Shelta: Bór.a'k'ena woman of the house the English, following English idiom The nld/as of the k'ena people           house

Pronouns	18	singular plural	6
	1	mwílša our d'íls	Irish, English, combining possessive pronouns ('mo', 'do' in the 1 and 2 persons singular, Irish, and the English in the rest) and Irish d'il meaning self, in Shelta used only in this construction
	2	dílša your d'íls	
	3	his d'il their d'íls her d'il its d'il	English pronouns usually favored in nominative over these forms which are favored in objective, except for mwílša and dílša which are used in all cases.

Possessive	a	Irish 3rd person masculine and feminine possessive pronoun used in some instances A grifin = his coat
	mwílša our dílša your his her, its	Irish and English, preferred forms their

Nouns		
Plural Marker	19	English +s +i +is
Possessive	20	English +s nad'ram's m'iskon = mother's breast

Formation From Adjectives and Verbs		
1) V/Adj + a = N		mun'i mun'iaθ rud'u rud'uaθ good heaven woo courtship
2) V +al= N		tāri tāral get'a get'al speak speech forgive forgiveness
3) V +in= N		English participle ending tāri.in a midril talk of the devil
4) V +er= N(agent)		English agent ending tāri er = speaker
V +ra= N(type of person)		possibly from English comp. and sup. endings spurk spurk'ra fuck whore

Adjectives		
Comparative / Superlative	21	English, all adjectives take regular endings +er / +est g'ami g'amier g'amiest bad worse worst
Placement	22	N + Adj Irish order, gloX šarog

Stringing English order, *šarog gloʔ*  
 red man  
 free variation  
 possibly for emphasis as in  
*gʷamiest ad gʷami lākīn tribli*  
 worst 2 bad girl family

Verbal Inflections 23

Present Tense / 3rd Person +s English

Past Tense +ed English, all verbs regular

Future Tense 1) use of present tense in context  
 2) +a used when misunderstanding of present tense would occur  
*Gruʔa di/l = he will shoot you*

Participle +in English, from +ing  
 +o or +u Irish, see perfect tense

Perfect Tense 1) English construction  
*The swibli had bogd his gris lʷesked.*  
 boy gotten fortune told  
 2) Irish influenced English construction using periphrastic after + O or u participle form  
*Stēs gloʔ ar gwil o.*  
 Exists man after lying. = The man has lain down

Passive same as English

Continual a+ Irish From 'ag' = at A *krad/i* = standing  
 A *getūl* = afraid  
 a+ English From phrases like a-float

Zero Locotive *Binl šarog lākīn mun/i spurkʷra*  
 Little red (haired) girl [is] good fornicator

Zero Auxiliary With Participle  
*Mwīlša and gloʔ slarskr tārī in*  
 Me and gate man [were] talking

Affirmation / Existence *stēs* = yes, yes is, this is, that is, here is  
 exists, is to be  
*Stēs gloʔ ar gwil o* = Exists man after lying

Negation *nīdʷeš* = no, not, nothing, don't, is/are not  
*Nīdʷeš mislī!* = Don't go!

No Relativizer *Nīdʷas grēdʷi gʷamia mwīlša* People who do  
 People do evil me = me evil

Interrogative Markers what English

Prepositions

*kē* Irish where, *Kē nyīpa hū?* = Where are you?  
*a* Irish A *tʷērpa hū?* = Will you cook?

*a* of, from English o' for of  
*a, i* in, from Irish 'i'  
*an* of, Irish, *tūr an skai* = bottom of the river

*ar* on, upon, from Irish 'ar a' = on the

*asturt,*  
*sturt* in, into, from Irish 'isteach'  
*aswurt,*  
*swurt* on, upon  
*aʔiver* before  
*apʷer* after, from Irish 'iar' used in perfect  
*graʔul* towards  
*gʷe* with, from Irish 'lʷe'  
*hal* across (rest)  
*horsk* across (motion)  
*mwēnʷa* behind  
*na* in, genitive of article for 'of the'  
*šerku na slī* = daughter in law

*nolsk* near  
*nup* back, behind  
*od* to  
*rāks* without  
*sūlʷa* around  
*širt* down, downward  
*tūr* up

Conjunctions *a* and, get/as a get/as = scores and scores  
 and English

Preposition / Determiner Deletion  
*Grīnlesk muni* = flax [of]the good [people] (=fairies)  
 means fern  
*Luš my kunʷa lʷy smālkʷra* = Eat my shit fresh  
 [with a] wooden spoon

3. This final section must examine the processes of word formation and lexical expansion that have given Shelta its vocabulary. The processes of word formation were the means used to form (for McAlister "deform"<sup>24</sup>). Shelta words from Irish words. Processes of lexical expansion refers to the ways in which this base lexicon expanded to meet the needs of Shelta speakers. The first area has been amply reported in the McAlister and Harper and Hudson sources. Harper and Hudson will be briefly reviewed here. They attribute the following four devices to Sampson and Meyer:

Word or syllable reversal *mac kam* = son  
*cailin lākīn* = girl

Metathesis, the transposition of consonants or consonant clusters

amarach aʔaram = tomorrow

Affixing sounds, s, gr, and g are the most frequent

āthair gāter = father

Substitution, arbitrary and random replacement of a consonant, most frequent are gr, g, s, s

bēlra šeldrū = tinker's cant

Harper and Hudson attribute three other devices to McAlister's work on the language. They are de-aspiration, denasalization, and apocope.<sup>25</sup> All of these mechanisms are described fully on pages 165 - 174 in the McAlister text.

The processes of lexical expansion have been described by Hancock in the article, "Lexical Expansion within a Closed System." Shelta's secrecy did effectively close the language to outsiders; but, its speakers had access to the Irish and English spoken around them. Some new words came in from those languages. In order not to decreolize the language, lexical expansion drew primarily from Shelta's own lexicon. Hence, three of the processes recognized by Hancock in the development of Krio are paralleled in Shelta. They are 1) incoining: "the creation of new terms from morphemes already existing in the language", 2) calquing: "translating ... component morphemes [of other languages] into the Creole", and 3) semantic extension: "where the primary gloss for an item has a source form parallel, but for which a further meaning exists with no traceable [source language] origin".<sup>26</sup> The remainder of this section will be examples of these processes. They were found in McAlister's texts in Shelta and in his vocabulary section.

Incoining words for beggar: gūk = old man, vagrant  
guk'ra = old beggar  
yūk = man  
yuk/ra = beggar  
d'uʔ = clothes  
d'uka = ragged beggar  
glader = to skin, swindle  
gladeri = half naked beggar

These examples also demonstrate semantic extension.

n'āk = rogue n'akis rēglūm = roguish iron, brass  
grimšer = time get' grimšer = hot time, summer  
gwōp grimšer = cold time, winter  
talosk = day talosk minurt = day now, today  
stafa talosk = long day, spring  
gloʔ = man gūt gloʔ = black man, policeman  
n'edas = a place, lodge  
lī-n'edas = lying down place, bed  
n'edas ladu = place dirt, graveyard  
k'ena = house šeds ken = police house, station  
b'ini k'ena = little house, tent  
kun'a k'ena = shit house, latrine  
g/or = penis g/or šed' in tera = penis stand in fire, poker  
skai = water skai grūt = water new, Amerika  
skai šural = water running, river  
skai t'elpi = water cooked, tea with milk and sugar  
tom = big tom gored = big money, gold  
tom yūk = big man, magistrate

Calquing luš swurt = drink up swurt a munk'ri = up the country  
širt a munk'ri = down the country  
nīd'eš a nāk' not a rag, stitch, naked  
gāp my tūr = kiss my ass spurk dīlša = fuck you  
riltōg rēglūm = sheet iron  
grēdi aʔīm = make out, pretend  
šerkū na slī = daughter in law

#### Semantic Extension

getūl from Irish word for fear, in Shelta also to shake, tremble  
glader to skin, extended to swindle (calque?)  
skai water, used in many ways as in  
solt, skait, and surt = arrested, transported by water, and hanged  
rīpuʔ prostitute, extended to "carrying on"  
the gātna's rīpuʔin = the young one's fooling around  
g'ami lākīn bad woman, extended to mean whore also  
inoʔ thing, fills any lexical void  
as a noun inoʔ l'ibis = thing sweet, sugar (also incoining)  
as a verb inoʔin m/iskon = giving breast, nursing (also incoining)  
tribli from Irish teaghlach for family, household  
in Shelta extended to mean also any large gathering of people (indicates breakdown of family unit in itinerant cultures)

Conclusion. Shelta has shown the structural and lexical elements commonly associated with creole languages. Its origin remains the barrier to creole classification. The opposing arguments have been presented. The most likely view seems to be McAlister's theory of relatively recent origin. Still keep in mind the other possibility. Shelta as an ancient language may have recreolized under English influence. One of McAlister's own comments supports this idea:

When these people began to fashion Shelta, they may possibly have been, primarily, Irish speakers: but they gradually adopted English from other wanderers with whom they joined forces. 27

At some time then, either at origin or post origin, Shelta creolized on an English base. The lack of initial pidginization does not conflict with this point.

A broader interpretation of pidginization is needed to correct the problem in creole classification. A linguistic sequence must consider sociocultural dimensions. Social conditions are of primary importance in contact situations. McAlister's statement above goes so far as to provide a language contact base. However, in Shelta, as in other Creoles, social contact was behind creolization. The contact factors were mentioned earlier: contact between vagrants and scholars, occupational groups, and anti-contact between upper and lower classes, religious groups (especially Protestants and Catholics, the legal system and criminals, the colonizers and the colonized. The itinerant life style itself represents the polarity of contact and anti-contact. It is the under-world. It has much in common with life on the frontier in America. Cunning and wit figure largely in both scenes.

McAlister thought the traveling scholars an indispensable part of Shelta's origin. They were a component. Perhaps linguists of this century like Sampson, Leland, Meyer, Hancock, Spitzer, follow the tradition of this group in their travel to contact informants of language groups. Their interest lies in the linguistic creativity of these groups. J.L. Dillard refers us to an anthropological term: "dramatic low-status assertion". He said that, "On the frontier, the inherent linguistic competence of disadvantaged groups like the Blacks and the Indians asserted

itself." 28 Parellel that with the itinerant class in Ireland. Both Leland's assumption of antiquity and McAlister's of scholarly assistance reflect their limited understanding of minority groups. The creole classification device is based on a similar misconception: it denies the social and anti-social contact that is basic to creolization.

Shelta originated and grew out of this contact. Today, it may still be alive and strong in Ireland because social discrimination is still strong. A followup study is needed to determine the status of Shelta at the present.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ian F. Hancock, "Shelta: A Problem of Classification," *Pidgins and Creoles: Current Trends and Prospects*, eds. David DeCamp and Ian F. Hancock (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1974), p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-2.

<sup>3</sup>R.A. Stewart McAlister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937), p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>Hancock, loc. cit.; see also Jared Harper and Charles Hudson, "Irish Traveler Cant", *Journal of English Linguistics*, V (March, 1971), 78.

<sup>5</sup>McAlister, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 128

<sup>7</sup>Leon Uris, *Trinity* (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1976), pp. 246-47.

<sup>8</sup>McAlister, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 135-7.

<sup>10</sup>Hancock, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>11</sup>McAlister, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 255-56.

<sup>14</sup>Hancock, loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>Harper and Hudson, op. cit., pp. 81-2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>17</sup>McAlister, op. cit., pp. 157-8.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-61.

24 Ibid., p. 164.

25 Harper and Hudson, op.cit., pp. 80-1.

26 Ian F. Hancock, "Lexical Expansion within a Closed System," *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Change* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1977), pp. 164-7.

27 McAlister, op. cit., p. 164.

28 J.L. Dillard, *All American English* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1975), pp. 148, 153.

Bibliography

Dillard, J.L. *All American English*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1975.

Hancock, Ian F. "Lexical Expansion within a Closed System" *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Change*. New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1977.

Hancock, Ian F. "Shelta: A Problem of Classification" *Pidgins and Creoles: Current Trends and Prospects*, eds. David DeCamp and Ian F. Hancock. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1974.

Harper, Jared, and Charles Hudson. "Irish Traveler Cant", *Journal of English Linguistics*, V (March, 1971), 78-87.

McAlister, R.A. Stewart. *The Secret Languages of Ireland*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1937.

Uris, Leon. *Trinity*. New York: Bantom Books, Inc., 1976.

*Some Words on Thief Talk.*

301

SOME WORDS ON THIEF TALK.

In the earliest notice we have of the language of the English thief, it is called "Pedler's French," or "Canting." Its first appearance as "Flash" may be seen in "The Regulator, or a discovery of the Theeves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, *alias* Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London," 1718. Both of these terms are now used.

Cant is from the Latin *cantare*, which signifies to enchant as well as to sing, and so the original thief may have been a singer, who stole the brains of his victims — not always the least valuable part of human possessions — through their ears.

In "A Caveat or Warening For commen Cursetors vulgarely called vagabones," set forth by Thomas Harman, 1567, to "cante" is defined "to speake."

In "Il Modo novo da intendere la lingua Zerga cioé parlar furbesca," 1549, to talk is expressed by *cantare*, and so the first English as well as Italian rogue must have been a talker; this much, at least, would seem sure.

Thieving without secrecy could hardly exist. Thief talk was invented to secure this. As another means to the same end, changes in its words are frequently made. Karl Weinen, one of the Prussian Criminal Commissioners, tells us in a little book entitled "Aus dem Berliner Verbrecherleben," published during the present year, that a new vocabulary is constantly appearing in Berlin. The same testimony is borne respecting thief talk in Suabia, which Schäffer, in his "Abrisz des Jauner und Bettelwesens in Schwaben," further declares to be more liable to change than other tongues.

The first vocabulary of the language of thieves that appeared in Europe was written in German, and printed about the year 1504. It bears the title "Liber Vagatorum. Der betlerorden." The professional beggar was then a thief, and is frequently such at the present day.

Copies of this first edition of the "Liber Vagatorum" are rare, and often not to be found even in some of the largest libraries of Europe.

In the second edition of this work (1528), which must be even more rare, since Avé Lallemond ("Das Deutsche Gaunerthum") informs us that only three copies are known: the editor, no less a person than Martin Luther, gives the honor of having invented thief talk to the Jews. How does the reformer prove this? Out of their vocabulary. This, he declares, contains many Hebrew words. Now, the list he gives us, out of two hundred and sixteen words and phrases, we find only sixteen which, by any reasonable stretch of the imagi-

nation, can be construed as Hebrew, — hardly enough, it seems to us, to establish this claim.

Henri Estienne, in his "Traité de la conformité du langage François avec le Grec," s. l. et a., p. 136, tells us that the largest part of *jargon* or thief talk was evidently taken from the Greek. How is this shown? By only three words, all, we must presume, which he was able to give, namely: *Arti* from *ἄρτος*; *cri* from *κρίαι*; *piot* from *πίος*; and so the Greek claim looks even worse than that made for the Jew.

"To the Gipsies, beggars, and thieves," says the compiler of the "Slang Dictionary, Etymological, Historical, and Anecdotal," 1873, "we are in a great measure indebted for the Cant language." How far is this true? The earliest extended notice we have of the Gipsies, or "Egyptians," as they called themselves, may be seen in Andrew Borde's "Fyrste Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge," issued, it is said, in 1527. But a careful examination of Borde's Egyptian goes to show that it is more Turkish Romany than English Gipsy; and another more important fact may be added: it does not contain a single word of English Cant.

Cant is not only not Gipsy at the present time, but never has been such. In the first English thief lexicon, "Harman's Caveat," we find but one solitary Gipsy word. In the first American glossary, that of Tufts, in his "Life and Adventures," written 1793-98, we have none. In the first French Canting vocabulary, entitled "Le Jargon ou langage d'Argot reformé," 1634, none. In the first Italian, "Il Modo novo da intendere la lingua Zerga," 1549, none. In the first German, "Liber Vagatorum," 1534, none; and in the first Spanish, "Romances de Germania," 1609, not more than a dozen out of a vocabulary of nearly twelve hundred words.

Slang and Cant words peculiar to each country, as we are told by Smart in his "Dialect of the Egyptian Gipsies," have become incorporated in the different Gipsy dialects, sometimes probably through a want of discrimination on the part of the reporter, who, hearing them used, has confounded them with the genuine Gipsy tongue. . . . "That's not a *tatscho lay*" is a frequent Gipsy comment on hearing a Canting phrase imported into conversation which is being professedly carried on in their own proper dialect. Cant words are intermingled with Gipsy in the same way, and on exactly the same principle, as ordinary or provincial English, but to nothing like the same extent. Possibly some words of this class may have inadvertently found their way into our vocabulary; but if so, they do not occur in Hotten's "Slang Dictionary" (London, 1864), and we leave them to be relegated to their proper place by those who may detect their real character (see Introduction, p. xxii.). And so it would seem that, so

far from Cant being in a great measure indebted to Gipsy, Gipsy is indebted to Cant.

The fact is, rogue talk is old talk, generally made up from old words of every country, and we owe most of these neither to the Gipsy, Greek, nor Jew. This appears not only in the *Cant* of England, but also in the *Argot* of France, the *Germania* of Spain, the *Kjeltringelatin* of Denmark, the *Fantesprog* of Sweden, the *Geiler* talk of Holland, the *Kochem-Loschen* of Germany, — all of which teem with archaisms. Even the *Ramasee* can be assigned to none of the existing languages of India.

This will explain how it is that some thief talk is largely Hebrew, especially that in use along the boundary lines between Germany and Poland, where the Jew swarms, or once did swarm. And this, too, well explains why the thief of that part of Italy once known as *Magna Grecia* still mingles classic Greek and old Phœnician words with his Italian, and why this Phœnician is still heard on the streets of Malta in the *lingua punica* of to-day.

This is the history of all tongues; the more degraded does not often appropriate the language of the more cultivated, while the latter borrows from the former without stint or measure; and our English is no exception to this rule. Indeed, much of our existing slang was once Cant, and one is oftentimes puzzled to distinguish the one from the other; only it should be borne in mind that, while Cant frequently arrives at being Slang, Slang seldom if ever becomes Cant. Even our *O. K.* seems to be an invention of American thieves; and stranger still, *Tye*, a neck-cloth, first appears in "The Names of the Flash Words now in vogue among thieves," to be found in "The Regulator, by a prisoner in Newgate," London, 1718.

The language of thieves does not generally present a figurative character in different and widely separated countries, as Barrow ("The Zincali," vol. ii. p. 132) states it does. Some thief talk, to be sure, — that of Spain, for example, — teems with figurative expressions; others have very little or none. Very little metaphor appears in the Cant of Teutonic countries; where Neo-Latin languages are spoken it abounds. Have climatic influences anything to do with this? And here is another curious fact. New York Cant abounds in abbreviations, while the *Germania* of Spain, the *Calao* of Portugal, and all German thief talk, have none at all. Can climate explain this, too?

In these days of higher education, taste for languages would seem to be especially developed among thieves, and here the American would appear to lead. *Venite* (come), Italian; *palaver* (talk), Portuguese; *sans* (without), French; *egrotat* (he is sick), Latin; *virtue ater* (virtue), English, (*ater*, without) Greek; *cocum* (sly), Lussnekodesch;

*schofel* (paltry), vulgar German; *quemar* (burn), Spanish; *shero* (head), Gipsy; *clink* (*klinken*, to clench), Dutch, — with many more that we could name, are to be found in New York thief talk to-day.

But in spite of foreign education, the American uses much more Old English than his English *confrère*, and a reason may readily be assigned. The American took most of his words from the oldest English thief vocabularies, or supplied his wants with English provincialisms, which, for reasons that are obvious, the Englishman could not use. So the dialect of the younger country would seem to be, by many hundred years, the older of the two.

Perversions abound in the earliest Cant vocabularies, and in many of our recent ones, too. Some of these perversions we may allow were the results of design, but this can hardly explain all of them. The greater part doubtless originated either through the ignorance of the transcriber, printer, or thief. And so we find in Harman's "Caveat," 1573, *askew*, which should be *a skew*, and *morts*, which should be *mots*. In Tufts's "Glossary of Thief Talk," as spoken in the Castle in Boston Harbor, now Fort Independence, 1793-98, we see *glin*, which should be *glim*, a star or light; *trick*, a watch, which should be *tick*; *kin*, which should be *ken*, defined "a stone" instead of "a store," etc. In the next earliest glossary of American Flash Language, used about the beginning of the present century, as the same appears in the dying confession of Thomas Mount, executed at Little Rest, R. I., we find *ken* written correctly, and correctly defined "a house." But as a set-off for this, we have in the Mount vocabulary all of Tufts's absurdities, with the exception of *ken*, just given, with other novelties besides, *e. g.*, *garf*, instead of *gaff*; *kincher*, instead of *kinchen*; *sercen*, instead of *screen*; *beek*, instead of *beak*; *wile*, instead of *wyle*, etc. But perversions of this kind are not confined to the older Cant vocabularies.

In Matsell's "Vocabulum" we have Captain *Topor*, which must be meant for *Toby*, a smart highwayman; *donnez* for *donner*; *poncy* for *ponez*, *parney*, explained "ring" instead of "rain," etc. Such are some of the minor difficulties which an attempt to explain Cant involves.

Thief words consist of only three parts of speech, and all of these in their simplest forms. It has no declensions, no conjugations, no syntax, no grammar. The "Thieves' Grammar," by Captain Alexander Smith, n. d., 1719-20, is no grammar at all. Therefore, if the thief is obliged to have recourse to grammar, — as, for example, in comparison, — he goes to the grammar of his native tongue.

It has been generally assumed that the talk of the thief is composed entirely of his peculiar words which go to make his language utterly incomprehensible. This, however, is not the case, Thief

talk, as well as correspondence, — for the thief can sometimes write, — shows less of this *patter* than might be supposed. The most voluminous of all forms of thief talk is doubtless the *Argot* of France. In specimens we have seen, contained in letters, — and several such have been brought to our notice, — the average of the words would not, we are sure, exceed ten per cent. We doubt whether if the general average of the peculiar words contained in the thief talk of any country would much exceed this. Of course we do not speak of the Rommany which is a regular language.

It was the fashion, when the classics were most in favor, to trace derivations to what were known as the *learned languages*, as if language in general began and ended with these. It would almost seem as if the scholars did not know that in every country, at a time not quite so remote, there did exist an old language from which the modern vernacular might have come. In many recent attempts at derivation we find something similar, only it is in modern instead of ancient tongues that origins are sought. Both Cant and Slang have suffered in this respect. We find words assigned to Gypsy, Hebrew, Hindoo, Turkish, etc., to anything and everything, rather than to the English mother-tongue.

In 1566 or 1567, probably in 1567, our first vocabulary of English Cant was published, under the title of "A Caveat or Warening for Common Cursetors, vulgarly called Vagabones, set forth by Thomas Harman, Esquire, for the pillite and propyt of his naturall cuntrey."

In his "Epistle to the singular good Lady Elisabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury," — certainly a strange patron for a somewhat peculiar book, — Harman tells us, as far as he could learn from an examination of a number of these "vacabones, their language, which they termed 'peddlers' Frenche or Canting,' began but within these few years or little above."

William Harrison, in his "Description of England," prefixed to Holinshed's Chronicles (1586), writes: "It is not yet full threescore years since this trade began, but how it hath prospered since that time, it is easie to iudge; for they are supposed, of one sex and another, to amount into above 10 000 persons, as I have heard reported. Moreover, in counterfeiting the Egyptian rogues, they have devised a language among themselves, which they term *Canting* (but other pedlers French), — a speach compact thirtie yeares since, of English and a great number of odd words of their owne devising, without all order or reason, and yet such is it as none but themselves are able to understand."

This shows how little was known of this talk, even at that early period.

The "Vocabulum or Rogue's Lexicon," by George W. Matsell,

Special Justice, Chief of Police, etc., (New York, 1859), asserts that the language of the rogue in New York is the language of the rogue the world over. This is not so. Even the Cant of England and America is not one and the same. Many terms to be found in the one do not appear in the other, or else they are entirely changed. In the matter of enumeration they do not agree. And the same differences everywhere exist. The Spanish Gitano and the *Germania* of Spain have only some words in common. The talk of the German Jew rogues and the *Lussnekodesch* (literally holy language — the commercial and business language of the Jew), although the ground-work of both is largely Hebrew, are far from being one and the same dialect. If we go to Farther India, we find precisely the same condition of things: the speech of the land and river thieves of Hindostan are two different and entirely distinct tongues.

Must we offer an apology for these words on thief talk? Here it is. The importance of thief languages will appear more clearly when we turn our attention to the manner of their construction and the elements out of which they were formed. The one shows the mental progress of the men — rude and totally devoid of all education — who made them; while the other often holds fragments of old languages fallen into oblivion, which it would be in vain to search for elsewhere (see Biondelli, "Origine, diffusione, ed importanza delle lingue furbesche," in his "Studii linguistici," Milan, 1850).

What is the origin of our English Cant?

At the time of the Conquest, under Norman oppression, many of the Saxons became outlaws and thieves. The language of these vagabonds was the language of the conquered, because they knew no other speech, and generation after generation simply continued this, with little or no change. And so, when the first vocabulary of this "unknown tongue, this lousey language, this peuysche speche," as old Harman calls it, was given to the world, more than five centuries after the Conquest, almost every word of it was Anglo-Saxon. Even now, it is more Anglo-Saxon than our English, — and this is English Cant.

*William Cumming Wilde.*

NEW ORLEANS, LA.

"Some Words of Thief's Cant"

*Journal of American Folk-Lore* Vol.11, Part 7

(1890) pp.301-316



31st August — 2nd September 1984

Conference on

LANGUAGES WITHOUT A WRITTEN TRADITION AND THEIR ROLE IN EDUCATION

A conference on "Languages without a written tradition and their role in education" will be held from Friday 31st August to Monday 3rd September 1984 at Thames Polytechnic, London SE18. It is sponsored by the Caribbean Communications Project, the National Gypsy Education Council, the Romany Guild, and the Romano Instituto.

THEMES

The objective of the conference is for people, teachers and community activists as well as academics, who do not know each others' work, to share their experiences and identify common themes. Plenary sessions will be arranged to concentrate participants' minds in three basic theoretical areas:

- A) Descriptive linguistics: the formation and adaptation of dialects or languages in language communities suffering oppression, marginalisation or subordination.
- B) Prescriptive linguistics: the response to and utilization of oral languages in schools and educational situations; whether or not a language should be "taught"; linguistic compromises that may be required by the educational situation.
- C) The sociology and politics of language movements in society; their strategies with regard to the state and educational institutions.

In addition, smaller working groups will be established to follow up each of these themes with subsidiary papers: we do not intend that participants should get into a huddle to follow only papers involved with their particular language. This will be a working conference, not a mere excuse for academic expenses, and the working groups will be required to report back to plenary sessions during the conference itself; we envisage that any collection or collections of papers published afterwards will be revised in the light of the conference.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The idea of the conference arose in the first instance from a desire to share experiences on the part of scholars in Europe and North America working on Romani (Gypsy) dialects and on Grcoles/Black English, and on their social situations. Of direct relevance to some of these situations, and in sharp contrast to some others, is the formalised process of developing "new" literary languages in Eastern Europe over the past 60 years. These are the core interests of the organisers, but they would welcome offers of papers concerned with any language community where there is a struggle to establish submerged cultural rights within the educational systems, especially in the sphere of language utilization or "teaching".

Since reading out papers already written down is a grossly inefficient method of communication, we intend to take a liberal policy on the prior distribution of multiple copies of formal papers, especially those with a substantial technical or empirical content.

The following will be organising the selection of papers:

- Dr. D.S. Kenrick, Adult Education Organiser, Hackney Institute and Director of the Romani Institute.
- Prof. I.F. Hanceck, Department of Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin.
- Prof. V. Friedman, Department of Slavic Languages, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- H. Dale, Brixton College, and Caribbean Communications Project
- E. Whittingham, Caribbean Communications Project
- S. Erike, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic, and Caribbean Communications Project
- Dr. T.A. Acton, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic, and Vice-Chairman, National Gypsy Education Council.

A more detailed prospectus and list of international participants, including those invited from Eastern Europe will be issued early in 1984.

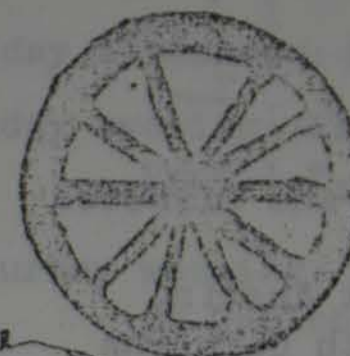
Abstracts of proposed papers should be sent to Thomas Acton ~~or Sylvia Erike~~, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic, Wellington Street, London SE18 6PF

#### CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS

The conference will be based in the Thomas Spencer Hall of Residence, Thames Polytechnic, Woolwich, London SE18. The cost per participant has been tentatively set at £69.85p, but there will be a hardship fund to enable reductions of this in special cases. Participants wishing to see London are welcome to book additional nights at very reasonable rates before or after the conference, and to contact the organisers for any scholarly help they may need regarding libraries etc. in London. Their attention is particularly drawn to the Notting Hill Carnival, which takes place the weekend before the conference, the leading popular Black cultural event in London, and to the Paddock Wood Horse Fair, which starts the weekend after the conference. Arrangements can be made for parties to visit these events.

#### CONTACTS

For further information get in touch with Thomas Acton ~~or Sylvia Erike~~, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic, London SE18.  
Telephone: 01-854-2030 extension 452 ~~or 525~~.



#### SECOND CIRCULAR

31st August - 3rd September

1984

Conference on

#### LANGUAGES WITHOUT A WRITTEN TRADITION AND THEIR ROLE IN EDUCATION

A conference on "Languages without a written tradition and their role in education" will be held, from Friday 31st August to Monday 3rd September 1984 at the Thomas Spencer Hall of Residence, Thames Polytechnic, Woolwich, London, SE18. It is sponsored by the Caribbean Communications Project, the National Gypsy Education Council and the Romany Guild.

#### THEMES

The objective of the conference is for people, teachers and community activists as well as academics, who may not know each others' work, to share their experience and identify common themes. The programme will be arranged to concentrate participants' minds in three basic theoretical areas:

- A) Descriptive linguistics and the formation and adaptation of dialects or languages in language communities suffering oppression, marginalisation or subordination.
- B) "Prescriptive linguistics", the response to and utilization of oral languages in schools and educational situations; whether or not a language should be "taught". linguistic compromises that may be required by the educational situation.
- C) The sociology and politics of language movements in society; their strategies with regard to the state and educational institutions.

Papers pursuing these themes will be given mainly in working groups; we do not intend that participants should get into a huddle to follow only papers involved with their particular language. This will be a working conference, and working groups will be required to report back to plenary sessions during the conference itself; we envisage that the collection or collections of papers published afterwards will be revised in the light of the conference.

#### WORKING PROCEDURE

The idea of the conference arose in the first instance from a desire to share experiences on the part of scholars in Europe and North America working on Romani (Gypsy) dialects and on Creoles/Black English, and on their social situations. Of direct relevance to some of these situations, and in sharp contrast to some others, is the formalised process of developing "new" literary languages in Eastern Europe over the past 60 years. These are the core interests of the organisers, but they would welcome offers of papers concerned with any language community where there is a struggle to establish submerged cultural rights within the educational systems, especially in the sphere of language utilization or "teaching".

Since reading out papers already written down is a grossly inefficient method of communication, we intend to take a liberal policy on the prior distribution of multiple copies of formal papers, especially those with a substantial technical or empirical content.

The following are organising the selection of papers:

- Dr.D.S.Kenrick, Community Languages Department, Hackney Institute, and Director of the Romani Institute.
- Prof.I.F.Hancock, Department of Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin.
- Prof.V.Friedman, Department of Slavic Languages, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- H.Dale, Department of General Education, Brixton College.
- E.Whittingham, Staff Development Tutor, Caribbean House.
- P.Knight, Project co-ordinator, Caribbean Communications Project.
- Dr.T.A.Acton, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic (Local organiser).

CALL FOR PAPERS

An indicative programme and a list of papers already offered appear below. A final programme will be sent to intending participants in July 1984.

No indication of the importance of papers will be signified by their assignment to group sessions rather than plenary sessions, and the programme order may be revised. The organisers are negotiating contributions from several other distinguished figures in the field: if you are one of them, get back to us as soon as you can !

The organisers will welcome further suggestions for papers, and the conference will be organised so that adequate time will be available in groups for presentation and discussion of all papers accepted. We are also interested in brief verbal presentations of educational projects and work in progress - and in poems, songs and any performance item for the Saturday evening concert. Let us know on your application form what you can do !

CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS

The conference will be based in the Thomas Spencer Hall of Residence, Thames Polytechnic, Woolwich. London SE 18 6PF. There will be a Hardship Fund for financial help to participants in special cases.

Participants wishing to see London are welcome to book additional nights at very reasonable rates before or after the conference, and to contact the organisers for any scholarly help they may need in London regarding libraries etc Their attention is particularly drawn to the Notting Hill Carnival, which takes place the weekend before the conference, the leading Black cultural event in London, and to the Paddock Wood Horse Fair (subject to confirmation), a Gypsy fair starting after the conference. Arrangements can be made for parties to visit these events.

APPLICATIONS.

The inclusive fee for meals, accommodation and residence from Friday dinner to Monday breakfast is £69.85. Monday lunch is extra.

Alternatively you may register as a non-resident participant and pay in advance only for those meals you wish to take.

If your employers will not pay for you to come, and you think you should get a reduction, or even financial help to come, write to us as soon as possible.

IN MEMORIAM

This conference was first set up by the late Sylvia Erike, who died on 23rd July 1983. The whole occasion will be dedicated to her memory.

LOCAL ORGANISER

For further information get in touch with Thomas Acton, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic, London SE18. Telephone 01-854-2030 extension 452 (Home telephone: 01-555-3648)

INDICATIVE PROGRAMME Friday 31 August - Monday 3rd September

Friday afternoon: Registration and introduction to working methods.

Friday evening: First plenary: Theoretical Perspectives, chaired by Prof.I.F.Hancock (University of Texas at Austin)

Saturday morning: Second Plenary: The Caribbean Communications Project: Perspectives on Caribbean languages, chaired by Dr.D.S.Kenrick (Hackney Institute) Third Plenary: The formation of literary languages, chaired by H.Dale (Brixton College)

Saturday afternoon will include group papers and workshops on topics concerned with education and Creole dialects, Asian and Romani dialects, and the language of song lyrics.

Saturday evening: Words in action and celebration: poetry, song, music, dance - and whatever we can put together !

Sunday morning: Continuation of group sessions, and time left free for church-going (the organisers will advise on the availability of church services.)

Sunday afternoon: Group sessions continuing earlier subjects, and including a presentation of the Mother Tongue Teaching Project of the EEC, and its relation to conference themes, chaired by Lucien Jacoby (EEC Social Affairs Directorate-General, Brussels) First report-back plenary.

Sunday evening: Party

Monday morning: Second report-back plenary, and discussion of follow-up to the conference.

A detailed programme of all plenaries, group papers, and workshops will be sent to participants in July. The following papers have been offered so far:

- Dr.T.Acton (Thames Polytechnic) The development of written English Romanes in England.
- S.Alladina (U.of London Inst. of Ed.) The status of Kachchi in India and Britain - Implications for Language Teaching.
- Y.Colleymore (Caribbean Communications Project) Adult Literacy as a Practical Case.
- Dr.M.Dalphinis (U.of London) 'Oral' Languages as Educational 'Inputs': Britain compared with St.Lucia, Gambia, Senegal and Nigeria.
- H.Dale (Brixton College) Social and Political Implications of Languages without Written Traditions in Adult Literacy.
- H.Devonish (U.of the West Indies) The application of descriptive linguistics to the Writing of Normative Grammars of Creole Languages (with special reference to Guyana)
- Prof.V.Friedmann (U.of N.Carolina, Chapel Hill) Historical, Nationalistic and Linguistic considerations in the Formation of Literary Languages: Past and Current problems in the Balkan States.
- Prof.I.F.Hancock (U.of Texas, Austin) Languages without a written tradition and ethnic defence.
- Dr.D.S.Kenrick (Hackney Institute) Towards a typology of Languages without a written tradition.
- Prof.R.Kephart (U.of Florida) An orthography and sample materials for teaching reading in a creole-speaking community (Carriacou).
- Dr.S.Levinsohn (Sumner Institute of Linguistics) Developing Educational Materials for the Inga (Quechuan) people of S.W.Colombia.
- E.Marselos (Athens) Problems of standardization of Greek Romanes.
- M.Roussou (Schools Council) The development of literary Cypriot Greek: has it any educational relevance ?
- M.Roussou & H.Nowaz (Schools Council: Mother-Tongue Project) Languages without a written tradition and the mother-tongue teaching movement.
- D.Stanley (City U./Albany Theatre) & E.Whittingham (Caribbean House) The utilization Anglo-Romanes and Caribbean English in song lyrics, and their educational use.
- D.Tong (New York) The non-status of urban Romanes in the community school in a Gypsy quarter of Thessaloniki.
- Dr.E.Varnagy & E.Pongracz (U.of Pecs) The Education of Boyash Gypsy children in Hungary.

Participants preparing theoretical papers may also contribute on particular languages to group sessions, e.g. Hancock on American Anglo-Romanes and Dalphinis on Patwa

