This paper discusses the language contact between Finnish Romani (Indo-Aryan, with earlier Indo-European contact influence) and Finnish (Uralic), with particular attention to the form and function of voice. I intend to show that the coding of the passive voice in Finnish Romani manifests Finnish features, resulting in changes in the argument structure. The paper adopts the theoretical concepts of contact linguistics and the study of language universals. The study is based on a corpus of 147,000 words, compiled mainly by Lars Borin (2001).

The term ‘influence’ is used as adoption of any elements or features from the contact language. We can define somewhat simplified convergence as the elimination (loss) of non-congruent forms in languages in contact, and interference as the introduction of new forms or rules in one language under influence from another (Beniak & al. 1984–5).

The verbal system of Finnish Romani shows a complex mosaic of archaisms and innovations. As a residue of the late Middle-Indo-Aryan ergativity system, finitized past participles are continuously used in past tense 3SG. At the same time, Finnish influence is manifested in various parts of the verbal system. First, Finnish interference is manifested in the occurrence of Agentless passive and Agent participle, or coding the voice in the past participle. Second, constructions and morphological oppositions not found in Finnish are (gradually) lost. An example of convergence is the loss of the synthetic passive in Finnish Romani. Instead, there are two kinds of analytic passives, formed by combining the copula with the Indic, ‘thematic’ past participle, or with the Greek, ‘athematic’ past participle in –men (< –ménos). In what follows, I shall discuss three related phenomena, triggered by Finnish influence, (i) coding of the voice in the two participle suffixes, (ii) Agent participle, and (iii) Agentless passive.

Unlike most other dialects that continuously use active past participles in the 3SG past tense (cf. Matras 1995), the finitization of participles is not restricted to intransitive verbs in Finnish Romani, even the past participles of transitive verbs being used actively in the 3SG past tense. The logical Subject of the sentence is then the grammatical one, and the construction is not ergative. Finitized participles can take same arguments as finite verb forms; cf. Example (1). Finitized participles no longer show gender agreement with the Subject, as was still the case in the 1930s (see Example (1a)) and not necessarily number agreement because of the influence of colloquial Finnish, consider Examples (1b–c).

(1) a. Mi dāi na haja–dil–i te
   my.FEM.SG NEG know-PP-FEM.SG.NOM COMPL
   dikk–el pelexk–i
   see-SUBJ.3SG card.PL
   ‘My mother did not know how to read the cards’ (AR:1940/00/0020)

b. omkent–i lii–l–o gutti–ki guos–i
   if child-PL.NOM get-PP-MASC.SG.NOM a little-even (Fin.) thing-PL
   ‘if children got even a few things’ (RB:1980/10/0075)

c. jos lapsi sais–O edes vähän tavaraita
   if child-PL.NOM get.COND-3SG. even a few thing-PL
   ‘if children got even a few things’

The same tendency can also be noted in other past tense forms. In Finnish Romani the active perfect and pluperfect are formed as compound tenses, the result of Finnish influence, with the copula som/aahhax ‘to be’ and the past tense form of the main verb (cf. Vuorela & Borin 1998). There is double marking of number and person, since these categories are coded both in the auxiliary and in the main verb, as in Example (2).
Butvares me s–om aab–t–om mulani
often I be-PRES.1SG be-PAST-PRES.1SG sad.FEM
‘I have often been sad’ (RB:1993/03/0022)

This is against the definition of the Indo-European tradition of linguistics that only auxiliaries are inflected in the verbal complex (cf. Ramat 1987). However, the past participle can be used in active function even in compound tenses instead of the inflected form; cf. Example (3a). Since it is even more usual in compound tenses than in the past tense, this could be the first sign of its grammaticalization as the uninflected constituent of the verbal complex, as in Indo-European languages and in Finnish. In Finnish it shows number agreement with the Subject (Example 3c), but in Romani the category number is occasionally lost; consider Example (3b).

(3) a. naa jou na jakkes huot douva na s–as
NEG he.NOM NEG as soon it NEG be-PAST.3SG
liilo
get.PP.MASC.SG.NOM
‘he had not received it as soon’ (RB:1980/04/0007)
b. kaal–e koon–en hin lii–l–o
gipsy-PL.NOM who-PL.OBL be.PRES.3PL get-PP-MASC.SG.NOM
penge hisbi
REFL house.PL
‘Gipsies who have obtained houses (for themselves)’ (RB:1978/07/0003)
b. romanit jotka ovat saa–neet talon
rom-PL.NOM who-PL.NOM be.PRES.3PL get-PP.ACT.PL house.SG
‘Roma who have obtained a house’

Because the past participle has acquired the aforementioned active functions, it is in accordance with the principle of isomorphism, i.e., the 1:1 -relation of form and function, that its function as the past participle passive is coded in another form. As Bubeník (2000) has noted, the weakening of the opposition between active and passive perfect is an old Indo-Aryan dilemma, and there have been several attempts at its solution. One possible solution in Romani is borrowing the Greek participle suffix –men. My corpus suggests that the tendency in Finnish Romani appears to be the coding of the voice in the participle: the active voice in the thematic and the passive in the athematic suffix in transitive verbs, which show interpretative ambiguity – but not in all cases or in every idiolect, since it occurs mostly among speakers born in the 50s and later. For example, the syntagm hin diile is ambiguous between the active and the passive, having two context-dependent interpretations: 1) have given, 2) has/have been given (the 3PL functions as Agentless passive with no agreement in number with the grammatical Subject, cf. below). In the suggested development the thematic participles get the active interpretation, the athematic ones the passive; consider the next Examples:

(4) hin dii–l–e ‘1. have given 2. has/have been given’
-> (a) hin dii–l–e ‘have given’
(b) hin diij–ime ‘has/have been given’ = innovation, interference

The morphological coding of the voice results in unambiguous alignment between morphology and semantics, i.e., whether the Subject is the Agent or the Patient. This development shows strong Finnish interference, because in Finnish the active and passive voice are coded in different participle suffixes; see Example (5).

(5) a. saa–nut b. saa–tu
get-PP.ACT.SG.NOM get-PP.PASS.SG.NOM
‘[have] got’ ‘[have been] got’

Further, there is asymmetry in the participle patterns over different tense-aspects, with the present passive participle missing in Finnish Romani, which is a cross-linguistically typical phenomenon (cf. Haspelmath 1994). This is shown in Example (6).

(6) Active Passive
Present  *rann–ime* ‘writing’
Past  *ran–lo* ‘having written’  *ran–lo ~rann–imeN* ‘written’

When the athematic suffix is replacing the thematic one in the passive function, the system of voice is developing towards greater symmetry. However, there are simultaneous tendencies towards greater complexity in other parts of the system, for instance, when the athematic suffix also codes the active present participle.

In what follows, I shall discuss two related phenomena with a specific argument structure. In the written language, four of the five Finnish participles, represented in Example (7), have an equivalent in Finnish Romani. The fifth participle, *luke–ma* for instance, is labelled as [the second] Perfect participle passive by Haspelmath (1994) and Agent participle in the Finnish tradition of linguistics. To avoid ambiguity, I shall adopt the latter notation.

(7)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>luke–va</em> ‘reading’</td>
<td><em>lue–tt–va</em> ‘readable, to be read’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>luke–nut</em> ‘having read’</td>
<td><em>lue–ttu</em>/<em>luke–ma</em> ‘read’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(based on Haspelmath 1994:156; but I understand the PRES.PART.PASS as expressing necessity in addition to potentiality)

Finnish Romani does not allow an overt Agent in the passivization (8b), whereas an inanimate Instrumental, marked by case, may occur (8a). The Instrumental cannot be promoted to Subject.

(8)  

| a. guosi, so tser–na horttas tsihkas vast–ensa  
thing.PL that make-PRES.3PL very well hand-PL.INSTR  
‘things that are made very well by hand’ (RB:1984/02/0016) |
| b. me som *sikj–ime* *Jeesus–eha*  
I be.PRES.1SG teach-PP ATHEM Jesus-SG.INSTR  
‘I have been taught by Jesus’ |

By contrast, the so-called Agent participle demands an overt Agent in the Genitive case. Finnish uses a specific participle form, i.e., the fifth participle for this construction (9b), whereas Finnish Romani uses the athematic participle in -*men* for the same purpose (9a); contrast (9a) with (8b). It is to be noted that interference features in Finnish Romani are mostly triggered by spoken Finnish but in this case by a written language, since the Agent participle hardly occurs in spoken Finnish.

(9)  

| a. Me pinsavaa jakkes, te Jeesus–es–ko *sikj–ime*  
I.NOM feel.PRES.1SG like when Jesus-SG.MASC-GEN teach-PP ATHEM  
‘I feel like taught by Jesus’ (RB:1996/05/0034) |
| b. Minä tunnen kuin Jeesuks–e–n *opetta–ma*  
I.NOM feel.PRES.1SG like Jesus-SG-GEN teach-PP AG  
‘I feel like taught by Jesus’ |

We now turn to the third phenomenon to be discussed in this paper. While Finnish lacks a ‘true’ passive, it manifests Agentless passives, hence ‘PASS’. It is not undisputed whether these are to be considered as passives or as actives with an indefinite Subject (cf. Palmer 1994). They can be treated as ‘backgrounding’ passives, which can occur without Object promotion (Foley and Van Valin 1984; cf. Palmer 1994). Finnish uses a specific verb form for this purpose (10), whereas Finnish Romani uses the 3PL, which is typical of the world’s languages (Keenan 1985) (8a). The use of the Agentless passive has probably extended on the impact of the Finnish pattern, even though the form differs.

(10)  

| Tavarat, joita tehdä–än oikein hyvin käsin  
thing.PL that make-PRES.’PASS’ very well hand-PL.INSTR  
‘things that are made very well by hand’ |

In colloquial Finnish, the Agentless passive form is used instead of the 1PL (11b). It has been suggested that Finnish Romani uses the 1PL in a similar way, omitting the Agent (11a).

(11)  

| a. j–aha toori mark  
go-PRES.1.PL there marketplace |
‘we go/let’s go to the marketplace’ (Valtonen 1968:145)

b. mennä–än sinne markkinoille
   go-‘PASS’ there market.PL.LOC
   ‘we go/let’s go to the marketplace’

To conclude, the verbal morphosyntax of Finnish Romani shows, at least to some extent, Finnish features. Three phenomena triggered by Finnish contact influence were discussed in this paper: (i) there is a functionally motivated tendency to distinguish morphologically between active and passive perfect, resulting in unambiguous grammaticalization of the participant roles, (ii) a passive-like construction with an overt Agent in Genitive case occurs, (iii) 3PL and 1P L are used as an Agentless passive. Only (i) can be regarded as a (partial) simplification of the system.

There is nothing new in that the speakers of Romani use Romani morphology in this way to “copy” the structure of a European contact language (cf. Matras 1995). Structural borrowing is possible wherever languages are in intense contact (Thomason & Kaufman 1988). The situation becomes more complicated when the great amount of idiosyncrasies is taken into account. This makes the system less regular and less predictable. The assumption of a monolithic linguistic system needs to be questioned, as argued by Vuorela and Borin (1998).

REFERENCES


http://www.ling.uu.se/lars/pblctns/lrec2-romani.pdf


