

## A WANDERING\* VOICE: THE LANGUAGE OF THE GYPSIES

The Rom, commonly known as Gypsies, provide a particularly good example of the notion that language is a key to a people's identity.

Some experts say the Gypsies come from central India. Others maintain that they originated in north-west India. Because of their constant mobility and the fact that at least ten centuries have gone by since their exodus from their homeland, it is difficult to say with certainty whether or not they originated in the Punjab. Scattered\* all over the world in a Diaspora which has lasted many centuries, we know that the Rom are united by a common origin. Many grammatical forms and a basic vocabulary in their language –called *Romani Chib*– are in many ways similar to some languages spoken in India today, which confirms that India is the Rom's original homeland.

When, a thousand years or more ago, the nomadic ancestors of today's Rom began their long journey westwards, they lived in proximity to sedentary peoples of different languages and customs from whom they borrowed certain linguistic and cultural characteristics. After the thirteenth century the process accelerated and the language of the Rom was transformed, sometimes profoundly. This phenomenon had positive effects on the Romani vocabulary, which was enriched with words from many European languages. But it also had negative effects because it increased the difficulties for speakers of the different dialects to understand each other.

Nowadays, in spite of the common origin of the language, speakers of the Danubian, the western Balkan, the Finnish, the Italian, the Sinto or the British Romani dialects –and this list is by no means exhaustive– find it hard to understand one another. Even worse: certain Rom groups are in the process of abandoning their language. For example, an elderly Spanish Rom recently moaned\*: «my grandchildren are no longer able to speak *Caló* with me!» [*Caló* is the Hispano-Romani dialect of the Iberian Gypsies].

The good news is that the Rom have not become totally assimilated or so far integrated in the western cultures so as to lose their identity or their originality. Moreover, in recent years a strong desire for cultural union based on their common origins, language and values has appeared among the Rom of different countries.

Furthermore, there is an increasingly widespread tendency to write in Romani, an oral language up to now. Old Gypsy songs and fables are being transcribed, but also documents and literary works. Newspapers, magazines and web-sites are also available. A Romani grammar in Romani was published in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and in 2001, in Sweden, there were TV programmes in Romani with Swedish subtitles. Also, there are those who believe that the language of the Rom should have a «special position» in public radio and television in the near future.

The publication of literary works in Romani and the promotion of the language in the media may be a first step towards its unification and may lead to a deeper self-awareness\* among the Rom. Today this movement is contributing to a transformation of the not always positive image of the Gypsy. The strengthening of their culture and their regained capacity to communicate in their own language seem to be helping the Rom to become full members of modern society.

(From the Internet. Adapted)

*wandering*: errant, sense rumb / errante, sin rumbo

*scattered*: dispersos / dispersos

*moaned (to moan)*: queixar-se / quejarse

*self-awareness*: consciència pròpia / conciencia propia

## PART ONE: READING COMPREHENSION

Choose the best answer according to the text.

[0,5 points for each correct answer] [Wrong answers will be penalized (-0,16)]

1. According to the text...
  - a) it is clear that the Gypsies originally come from central India.
  - b) it is clear that the Gypsies do not come from the Punjab.
  - c) it is clear that the Gypsies originally come from India but it is not sure from which specific region.
  - d) because of their constant mobility, there is nothing clear about the origin of the Gypsy people.
  
2. The word *sedentary* is used in the text. A word with an opposite meaning can also be found in the text. This word is...
  - a) widespread.
  - b) nomadic.
  - c) enriched.
  - d) assimilated.
  
3. Which problem is pointed out in the text?
  - a) It's difficult for speakers of one Romani dialect to understand speakers of a different dialect.
  - b) Traditional Rom fables and songs have died out.
  - c) There are many grammar books and dictionaries to teach or learn the Romani language.
  - d) Books are being written and the language is losing its original exclusively oral character.
  
4. How many dialects of Romani exist today?
  - a) Less than three.
  - b) Between three and five.
  - c) Between five and seven.
  - d) More than seven.
  
5. *Caló* is...
  - a) a variety of Romani spoken in some special Iberian planes.
  - b) a variety of Romani which is in danger of disappearing.
  - c) a language which disappeared centuries ago.
  - d) the Romani word for «Spanish».
  
6. According to the text, which of the following actions, which promote the use of Romani among the Gypsies, is true for the present time?
  - a) Swedish TV programmes have Romani subtitles.
  - b) The Rom are writing down their old Gypsy songs and fables.
  - c) All Romani dialects have been unified in one single Romani language.
  - d) Romani has a «special position» in public radio and television.
  
7. The last paragraph suggests that the opinion that western societies have of the Gypsy culture is often...
  - a) positive.
  - b) pessimistic.
  - c) negative.
  - d) accurate.
  
8. According to the author, which of the following is helping the Rom to gain access to modern society?
  - a) Assimilation by the western societies and communication in foreign languages.
  - b) The preservation and cultivation of their own ancient language and culture.
  - c) Translating important western literary works into the Romani language.
  - d) Translating important Romani literary works into western languages.