

## The dialects of Romani: history and classification

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Interest in the classification and historical development of Romani dialects goes back to the first comparative investigations of the language in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Pott 1844, Miklosisch 1874, Gilliat-Smith 1915). In my talk I will briefly survey those approaches and then discuss contemporary views on the classification of Romani dialects. I take issue with the 'genetic tree template' that views dialect differentiation as the offshoot of pre-existing 'branches' of the language prior to their dispersal and settlement in Europe (cf. Boretzky 2007). I present the alternative view that the differences between Romani dialects emerged mainly in situ, through a spread of innovations in geographical space from several innovation epicentres. Romani dialect differentiation is therefore a spread, not a grid with strict boundaries. Any reference to 'branches' or 'groups' is therefore necessarily one of convenience rather than one that can be justified by an intrinsic ontology. I discuss implications for language change as well as for the socio-historical understanding of Romani societies.

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