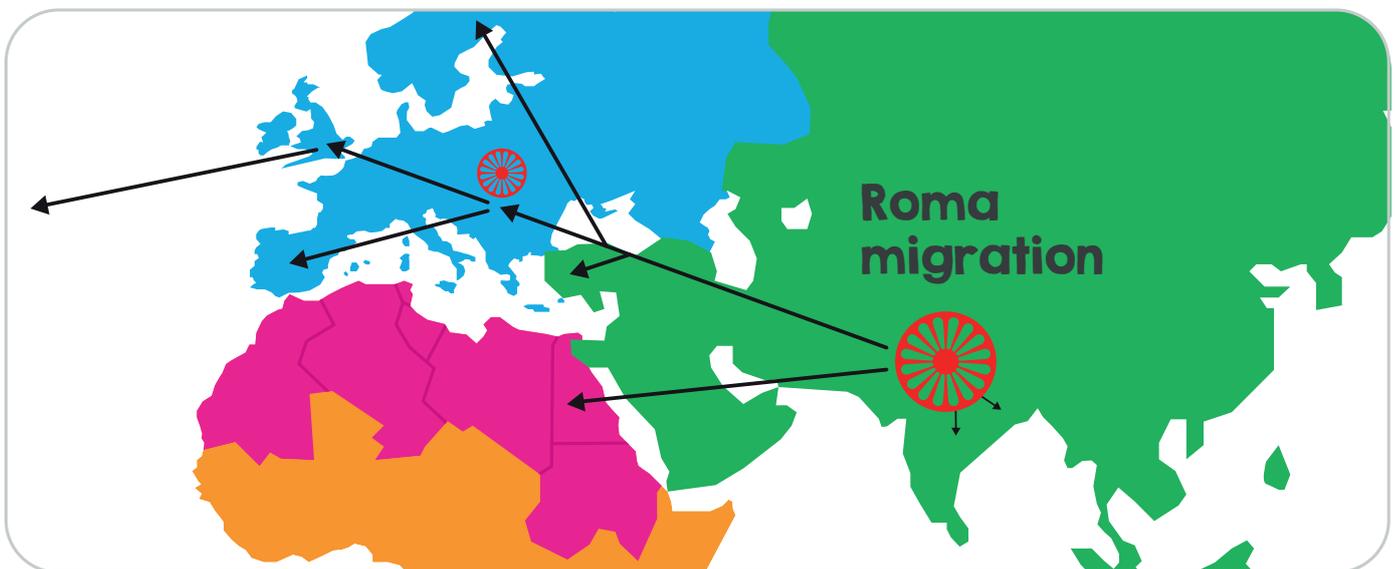# FlashAcademy® EAL

Learner Profile: Romani

This guide presents common challenges faced by Romani learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems; however, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging. Romani is a macrolanguage with many dialects. Most Roma speakers are bilingual and are also fluent in the majority language of their host country.

Roma migration

Facts

- **Language family:** Romani is an Indo-European language and is one of the Western Indo-Aryan languages. This means the structure is more closely related to Gujarati.

- **Native speakers:** There may be as many as 3.5 million speakers

- **Location:** There are Romani speakers across the world. It is recognised as a minority language in Finland, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Sweden. The language originates from northern India.

- **Writing system:** There is no standard written form for Romani. When it is written, writers tend to use the Latin alphabet. The written form may be influenced by English or Czech orthography. The written form may also be based on the Vlax Romani dialect or a mix of dialects.

FlashAcademy® EAL

Learner Profile: Romani 🏳️

Dialects

There are many different Romani dialect families due to speakers being dispersed across Europe. More information about different dialects can be found here: **https://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/rms/**. There are many discussions on grouping Romani dialects and this group is based on**https://www.ethnologue.com/subgroups/romani**. Many of these dialect groups are highly endangered, with the most common dialect family being Vlax Romani. There is a North-South divide of dialects.

• VLAX-ROMANI
Speakers of this dialect group outweigh other Romani dialect groups. Lots of Romanian loan words and influence. Core vocabulary and some grammatical features between dialects remain the same.
Dialects include: Kalderaš/Kalderash, Lovári, Machwáya/Mačvaja, Chuári/Čurari, Tsolári, Kalburdžu and Čergar
Location: Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Turkey and most migrant communities worldwide

• BALKAN ROMANI
Dialects include: Ajia Varvara, Sepečides-Romani and Burgurdzi
Location: Serbia (Kosovo), Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Romania, Ukraine and Iran

• BALTIC ROMANI
Dialects include: Polska Romani and North Russian Romani
Location: Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia

• CARPATHIAN ROMANI (Central Romani)
Dialects include: East Slovak Romani, Moravian Romani, West Slovak Romani and Gurvari
Location: Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia

• KALO FINNISH ROMANI
Location: Finland and Sweden

• SINTE ROMANI
These dialects are too far removed from Vlax dialects to be fully comprehended by speakers of these dialects.
Dialects include: Romungri, Vend, Burgenland Romani, Abbruzzesi, Serbian Romani, Slovenian-Croatian Romani and Piedmont
Location: Germany, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Austria, Ukraine, Romania

• WELSH ROMANI
Location: United Kingdom

FlashAcademy® EAL

Learner Profile: Romani

Pronunciation

• There is lots of variation between speakers as pronunciation is influenced by the majority language of the country.

• The 'th' sound, found in 'think' and 'that' which is not a feature of most Romani dialects, may be pronounced as 'd' or 't' by native speakers.

• Both diphthongs and long and short vowels are features of many dialects of Romani. The long-short vowel distinction is most prevalent in Western Romani dialects.[1] The vowels differ depending on contact to other languages. The schwa sound, found at the end of 'butter', is not found in some varieties of Romani.

• The 'r' sounds in Romani are different to those in English.

• The stress of a word falls on the last syllable of the word in many Romani dialects.

Grammar

• Romani typically has two genders, male and feminine, and eight cases due to historical Greek influence (nominative, oblique accusative, dative, ablative, locative, instrumental, genitive and vocative)[2]. Roma pupils may find the grammar of modern foreign languages easier to understand by showing the mapping of Romani grammar to the MFL. The gender in Romani may lead Roma pupils to refer to inanimate objects as 'he' and 'she' as pronouns will agree in Romani.

• Romani is an agglutinative language[3], which means there can be many prefixes and suffixes added to the verb stem to change the meaning of the verb.

• Due to animistic beliefs that there are spirits in nature, some Romani constructions may sound personified if translated literally. For example, 'he drowned' in Kalderaš Romani, 'tasadyas les o pai', literally means 'the water drowned him'[4].

• As verbs in Romani are quite highly inflected, the pronoun can be dropped without the meaning being lost.

• Romani does not have an indefinite article. Whilst it is common for Romani speakers to use the indefinite article of the majority language of the country they live in, be aware that the definite and indefinite article use may not be the same as in English. For example, 'bi grasteskero' means 'without horse', without the indefinite article that we have in English[5].

• The possessive, or genitive, case follows the subject in Romani and both a determiner and possessive pronoun and noun can be present, unlike in English. For example, 'o phrala mre dadeskere', literally, 'the brother my father's' (my father's brothers)[6].

[1] https://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/2/Matras_Rmni_ELL.pdf
[2] http://romaniprojekt.uni-graz.at/romani-morphology.en.html
[3] Matras, Y. (2002) Romani: A Linguistic Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[4] https://www.amazon.co.uk/Learn-Romani-Das-duma-Ronald-Lee/d-p/1902806441/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1WVX80276GSZN&dchild=1&keywords=learn+romani&qid=1590678518&sprefix=romani+lea%2Caps%2C169&sr=8-1
[5] http://romaniprojekt.uni-graz.at/romani-syntax.en.html
[6] http://romaniprojekt.uni-graz.at/romani-syntax.en.html

FlashAcademy® EAL

Learner Profile: Romani

Writing

• There might be low levels of literacy amongst Roma pupils and parents due to discrimination in education systems[7].

• Romani is mainly spoken so there are few written texts. Pupils may have been exposed to texts written in a second language. There is growing support to record Romani as a written language and it is also beginning to be used online for electronic communication[8]. For this reason, written Romani is highly phonetic and very regular, so native speakers may struggle with the irregularities in English spelling.

• Slovak Romani interpreters in schools still translated into Slovak for written letters because Romani is mainly an oral language[9].

• If Romani is written, [tʃ], the first and last sounds in 'church', is normally written as č. [dʒ], the first and last sounds in 'judge', is normally written as dž.[ʃ], the first sound of 'shut', and [ʒ], the sound in the middle of 'treasure' are written as š and ž respectively.

Cultural aspects

• Most Romani dialects are only used privately, by families[10].

• Due to a history of persecution, Roma families may be distrustful of authorities. They may also be scared to disclose ethnicity, instead stating their ethnicity as that of their previous host country.

• Studies have shown Roma students perform better when the teacher is encouraging and they have positive relationships in the community. Also embedding Roma culture in the classroom helped to make Roma pupils feel more welcome[11].

• Children have mentioned other pupils being unfriendly and feeling the need to hide their identity to be accepted by peers. They are also unlikely to see friends outside of school[12]. Encourage parents from different ethnicities to communicate with coffee mornings.

• It is important to set high expectations to motivate Roma pupils.

• Parents may feel prejudiced towards interpreters after bad treatment in previous countries[13].

• Roma pupils frequently have low attendance and low majority going to secondary school[14].

[7] https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014_roma-survey_education_tk0113748enc.pdf
[8] Matras, Y. and A. Tenser (2016) 'Complementizers in Romani'. In Boye, K. and P. Kehayov (eds) Complementizer Semantics in European Languages. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
[9] http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/104628/3/MP%20Inclusion%20of%20Slovak%20Roma%20pupils.pdf
[10] http://romaniprojekt.uni-graz.at/romani-socio.en.html
[11] https://shura.shu.ac.uk/19267/1/10694147.pdf
[12] https://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Professional%20Development/Documents/NC19_Foster_Improving_outcomes_for_GRT.pdf
[13] https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/87455_book_item_87455.pdf
[14] https://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Professional%20Development/Documents/NC19_Foster_Improving_outcomes_for_GRT.pdf

FlashAcademy® EAL

Learner Profile: Romani

• There is not one majority religion, rather the Roma tend to adopt the majority religion of the host country, therefore, there are Catholic, Muslim, Baptist, Pentecostal and Protestant Roma groups[15].

• Using Roma cultural ambassadors to help in the classroom has been shown to help other Roma pupils.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

📍 Beginner > A few basics > Personal pronouns

📍 Beginner > Letters & Numbers

📍 Beginner > Phonics 1 > Set 4

📍 Beginner > Phonics 1 > Additional sounds

📍 Beginner > Food & Drink > Articles

📍 Beginner > Food & Drink > Countable and uncountable nouns

📍 Beginner > Holiday & Travel > Prepositions of time (in, on, at)

📍 Beginner > Holiday & Travel > Prepositions of place (in, on, at)

📍 Beginner > Holiday & Travel > In, on, by

📍 Beginner > English Language > Noun phrases

📍 Intermediate > English Language > Word types II

📍 Intermediate > Environment & Society > Articles

Created by the FlashAcademy® Education Team