

Communication skills of children from Roma families in Slovak language in the first year of primary schools

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Abstract--- *The need for man to communicate, socialize, form and develop social relationships with other people is one of the basic existential needs of the human race. This need is realized in the context of social relations. In every person's life, the first language is the mother tongue, by which social communication takes place first in the family, then in kindergartens and primary schools.*

The developed mother tongue is an advantage of a child when starting school. The mother tongue is the language children learn as the first one in the process of socialization (Lemhöfer, K., Schriefers, H., & Hanique, I. 2010), the language children have learnt in their life, and which influences their future. Also Basil Bernstein (1971) considers a language the main means of person's socialization, and emphasizes a direct relationship between a social group and a language. In our paper, we discuss language competence in pupils in the first year of school attendance. Our main goal is to compare the language competence of pupils from Roma families whose mother tongue is Roma with pupils whose mother tongue is Slovak. Both groups attend elementary schools with Slovak language.

The sample included pupils with the Romani mother tongue ($n_1=69$) and pupils with the Slovak mother tongue ($n_2=76$); the pupils attended the first year of primary schools with the Slovak language of instruction. The field diagnosis had two phases: the initial phase – at the beginning of a school year in September, and the final phase – at the end of the school year in June. In our study, we used the Heidelberg Speech Development Test (H-S-E-T, Grimmová, Schöller, Mikulajová, 1997), where the authors differentiate between language competence, language performance, and language levels. The test provides a rather complex picture about an achieved level of language development in children of younger school age. Our testing within the Heidelberg test focused on Sentence building (SB). The findings that we state are interesting also in the moment where the diagnosed children whose mother tongue is Romani had significantly lower scores than the children whose mother tongue is Slovak in comparison of the studied period September - June. We associate this status with the possibility that children whose mother tongue is Romani come from socially disadvantaged environment that is accompanied by poverty and social exclusion. (Vanková, K., 2017) The environment children grow up in significantly influences their communication abilities. To some extent, our findings correspond with Pierre Bourdieu (1990) who, based on his theory, states that children from socially more stimulating environment – families gain better habitus and cultural capital because they are

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more prepared for school, are more linguistically capable, and understand the notions significantly better, and vice versa. We emphasize the fact that performance of children from Roma families with the Romani mother tongue is average, and we evaluate the differences in the scoring as statistically significant. The found differences are significantly lower and the progress in vocabulary is not very significant in the studied period in the children with the Romani mother tongue in comparison with the children with the Slovak mother tongue.

Keywords--- *Communication. Language maturity. Mother tongue. Child with Romani mother tongue. Child with Slovak mother tongue.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication means the exchange of information, which is an integral part of human existence and an essential condition for the social behavior of people in society. In the educational process, communication plays the most important tool in relation to the development of pupils' social skills. If a pupil from a Roma family where communication takes place in a Romani language in the first year of primary school cannot communicate in a school environment where the language of instruction is Slovak, then this pupil cannot respond to consent or disagreement, express their feelings, desires. For this reason, these pupils with Roma family backgrounds have difficulties in understanding, leading to feelings of anxiety, fear and frustration that can lead to aggression.

Pupils coming to primary school come from different family backgrounds. They have their habits, thinking, attitudes, mother tongue, values, as well as the knowledge they have acquired in a family environment. The pupil uses the mother tongue he / she learned in the family environment in the process of socialization. (Lemhöfer, K., Schriefers, H., & Hanique, I. 2010), the language learned in man's life affects his future. As Basil Bernstein (1971) says, the pupil's language maturity shifts his / her participation and involvement in a particular social group not only in the school environment.

The claims of many authors such as Řičan, P. (1991), Plaňava, I. (1994), Řičan, G., K. (2003), Walsh, F. (1982), and Průcha, J., Mares, J., Walter, E. (2003) identify with ours. A family environment in which children grow up performs many functions, including social, psychological, economic and biological. If the family structure is set correctly then it is assumed that children growing up in such a family have the right socio-psychological development. In such a family they acquire behavioral patterns, properly set up social communication, and learn responsibilities for their actions. Furthermore, we agree with the claims of various authors such as. Légiöse, JP (1995), Horváthová, J. (2002), Portik, M. (2003), and Cina, S. - Cinová, E. (2010) that children who grow up in Roma families and speak their mother tongue Roma, social interaction is very difficult to establish in the school environment, which has a negative impact on their future educational process.

Our sample includes children from Roma families whose mother tongue is Romani in comparison with the sample including children with the Slovak mother tongue.

We agree with the statement by Rosinský, R. (2009) "...when starting school at the age of six years, suddenly they are in an unknown, foreign, sometimes even unfriendly environment which they must face on their own, without help of their parents who they depended on until then. At school, almost everything is unknown for them – there are no Roma teachers (with exception of those schools where they gradually, but so far in a small extent, started to use teacher's assistants – Roma), aids and textbooks' contents and designs are adapted to understanding and style of Slovak children, etc. Primary school pupils who come from Roma families and communicate in their mother tongue do not manage to keep pace with pupils whose mother tongue is Slovak - the language of the primary school where the teaching process takes place. Therefore, in our society, primary school teachers have to learn to manage communication barriers. Our research shows the communication maturity of pupils with mother tongue Roma and pupils with mother tongue Slovak.

The school educational process in the Slovak Republic, especially in the first years of primary schools, strives to eliminate inequalities in relation to equality in access to education, equality in educational conditions and equality in educational outcomes.

Interesting is the view of the book "Class, Codes and Control" by Bernstein (1971) developed his theory about reproduction of social inequalities through education system based on analysis of the relationship between a school

system and a way of communication in France. His theory is based on the existence of two types of language codes (restricted and elaborated) that are obtained by an individual during socialization particularly in a family, and which influence their abilities, behaviour and responses to education at school. He sees the role of school in reproduction in the fact that school assumes an elaborated type of the language code in all children and thus hinders access to education in children with the restricted language code, which results in a cultural gap.

In the book “Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture”, Bourdieu (1990) introduces a new term “habitus” that he describes as a set of person’s characteristics developed in the process of socialisation. Children from socially more comfortable families – higher classes gain better habitus and cultural capital as they are more prepared for school, are more linguistically capable, and understand the notions significantly better. School as an institution assumes the habitus of higher classes and a greater cultural capital, and thus, children from such families are more successful in their studies and have better results than children from lower social classes. They describe school as the one that does not eliminate inequalities but the one that increases them.

As an example, we state the studies by Katriňák, T. (2004), Veselý, A. – Matejů, P. (2010), and Straková, J. et al. (2006) in which the common denominator are inequalities, where children from different social classes have different economic and cultural capital, which results in different attitudes to and opinions about education.

II. METHODS

To obtain results from the research we used a quantitative form of research in the form of a questionnaire. The research tools, their functionality and appropriateness were verified in pre-research; then, we modified them for adaptability in the field. Field research was conducted in two phases at the beginning of the school year in September and at the end of the school year in June so that progress/regress was found. In the study, we used the test – H-S-E-T – Sentence building (SB) in Slovak and Romani. Other research methods included: analysis, synthesis, comparison, mathematical and statistical methods, and interpretation method.

Objective

Our main research goal is to compare the language competence of pupils from Roma families whose mother tongue is Roma with pupils whose mother tongue is Slovak. Both groups attend elementary schools with Slovak language. Furthermore, we will examine progress in the communication skills of both groups at the beginning of the school year in September compared to the end of the school year in June.

Our *assumption* is there is a statistically significant difference in communication skills in sentence building between children with the Romani mother tongue and children with the Slovak mother tongue.

Sample

Scientific research was carried out at primary schools in the first years in the Slovak Republic. The sample included 69 pupils of the first year in the school year 2015/2016 with the Romani mother tongue – all these children came from socially disadvantaged environment; and 76 pupils of the first year in the school year 2015/2016 with the Slovak mother tongue.

Table No. 1 Sample

Sample	Frequency – n	%
Children with Romani mother tongue	69	47.59
Children with Slovak mother tongue	76	52.41
Total	145	100.00

Data collection

The first phase of field research, i.e. the first testing, was conducted at the beginning of the first year of primary schools in September of the school year 2015/2016. Research was conducted at the primary schools in the territory of the Slovak Republic.

The second phase of field research, i.e. the second testing, was conducted at the beginning of the first year of primary schools in September of the school year 2015/2016. Research was conducted at the primary schools in the territory of the Slovak Republic.

The ethics of the scientific study was in accordance with the Act No 122/2013 Coll. on Protection of Personal Data.

III. RESULTS

Our objective was to find out the extent and level of active vocabulary in children with the Romani mother tongue and in children with the Slovak mother tongue at the beginning of school attendance in the first year of primary school in the school year 2015/2016 in September in comparison with the second testing at the end of the school period in June. In our study, we used the Heidelberg Speech Development Test H-S-E-T (SB) – the pupils made meaningful sentences based on given two or three words in September and June.

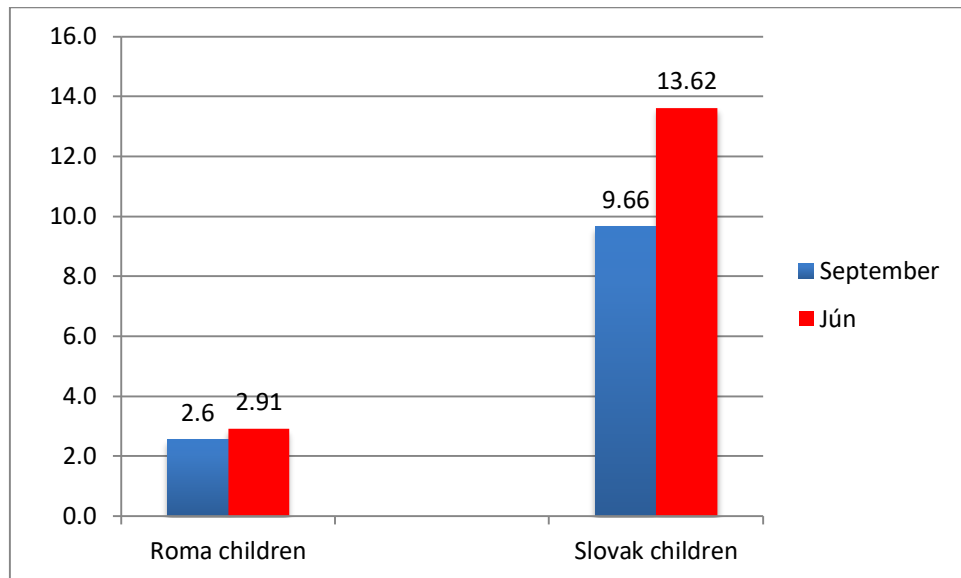
Table No. 2 Results of the Roma pupils with the Romani mother tongue in comparison with the Slovak pupils whose mother tongue is Slovak in communication skills at the beginning and the end of the studied period

TEST 2 AM	September	June	Diff	Diff (%)
Roma children	2.6	2.91	0.36	12%
Slovak children	9.66	13.62	3.96	29%

The results in the Table clearly show the fact that there are statistically very significant differences in the progress of communication skills in the children with the Romani mother tongue at the beginning and the end of the studied period in comparison with the children with the Slovak mother tongue at the beginning of the studied period in September and at the end of the studied period in June.

The results in communication skills – sentence building during the whole school period in the Roma children with the Romani mother tongue show very slow progress diff 0.36, i.e. improvement in communication skills only by 12%, in comparison with the children whose mother tongue is Slovak in which we found progress in communication skills by diff 3.96, i.e. 29%. The difference between the studied subjects is considerable and it is 17%.

For a better illustration we show the results in Graph No. 1.



Graph No. 1 Results of the Roma pupils with the Romani mother tongue in comparison with the Slovak pupils whose mother tongue is Slovak in communication skills at the beginning and the end of the studied period

IV. DISCUSSION

Every human being is unique. A child who is born and grows up in socially disadvantaged environment, this fact in a certain way influences her/his future. The developed mother tongue is an advantage of a child when entering the common school environment along with children of the majority with the Slovak mother tongue.

Our study shows also important work of the teachers who worked with the children during the whole school period in the first year of primary schools. The social interaction occurs during the educational process. The social interaction is a process in which an individual or a group affects another individual or group. It is any form of an encounter which triggers a certain communication reaction. The whole pedagogical process is influenced by various interaction processes which are always mutual – a teacher affects pupils and vice versa. The interaction is affected by multiple factors, such as classroom climate, teacher's authority, teacher's interpersonal behaviour, and above-mentioned communication.

Communication at school has many various forms – official or unofficial, verbal or nonverbal. Teachers communicate with pupils during breaks, lessons, before lessons, and out of school.

Education must be adapted individually to each child, which is very demanding for teachers, their constant preparation and careful monitoring of everything what children do and feel. For this purpose, Maria Montessori developed a special method of observation which should have ensured that children are provided with precisely that type of stimuli they need at the moment because they are particularly sensitive to it. In her opinion, such stimuli should affect all the senses because only through them can children really understand the world around them and become its part. It is also necessary that the offered didactic material is always a step ahead of current interests of children and thus leads them to more active approaches to work and efforts to do and know more and more.

We agree with the statements by Maria Montessori who states that education is not something that is done by teachers, but it is a natural process that develops spontaneously in every human being. Children do not learn only by listening to teachers but through active experience during which they affect their surroundings; and also their individual activity is a factor which stimulates and generates their development. (Vanková, K., 2017)

Our findings are based on the fact that children with the Romani mother tongue achieve significantly lower scores than children with the Slovak mother tongue in communication skills at the end of the studied period.

However, we must say that the children with the Romani mother tongue came from socially disadvantaged environment that is accompanied by poverty and social exclusion. The environment children grow up in significantly influences their communication skills. To some extent, our findings correspond with Bourdieu, P.

(1990) who, based on his theory, states that children from socially more stimulating environment – families gain better linguistic capital, are more prepared for school, are more linguistically capable, and understand the notions significantly better, and vice versa, which is stated also by Vanková, K. (2006), Kaleja, M., Zezulková, E. (2016).

The Slovak legislation defines a pupil from socially disadvantaged environment, e.g. by the Act No 245/2008 Coll. on Education: “a pupil living in an environment which, related to the social, family, economic and cultural conditions, inadequately stimulates development of mental, volitional and emotional characteristics of a child or a pupil, does not encourage his/her socialization, and does not provide enough adequate stimuli for development of his/her personality”(translated by the authors).

Our findings clearly show the fact (Table No. 2, Graph No. 1) that there are statistically very significant differences in the progress of communication skills in the children with the Romani mother tongue at the beginning and the end of the studied period in comparison with the children with the Slovak mother tongue at the beginning of the studied period in September and at the end of the studied period in June.

The results in communication skills – sentence building during the whole school period in the Roma children with the Romani mother tongue show very slow progress diff 0.36, i.e. improvement in communication skills only by 12%, in comparison with the children whose mother tongue is Slovak in which we found progress in communication skills by diff 3.96, i.e. 29%. The difference between the studied subjects is considerable and it is 17%.

Our statement is: Children with the Romani mother tongue come from the school environment, where the communication language is Slovak, to the home environment where their knowledge from school should be developed; however, communication in the environment to which children come is in their mother tongue, i.e. Romani. Children learn about what surrounds them. If children with the Romani mother tongue attended school with the Romani language of instruction, these children would not fail in the educational process. Also Bernstein, B. (1971) considers a language the main means of person’s socialization, and emphasizes a direct relationship between a social group and a language.(Vanková, K., 2017)

However, we must say that all children with the Romani mother tongue attend primary schools with the Slovak language of instruction. Cina, S. – Cinová, E. (2010) state about the Romani language that “the Romani language was, by the act on using the languages of national minorities that was adopted in the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 1999, declared to be an official national language. Its position was enhanced also by signing the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages which is the most complex framework agreement regulating the issues of protection and use of the languages of national minorities in education, jurisdiction, state and public administration, media, culture, economic and social life, and cross-border cooperation, and was ratified by the Parliament of the Slovak Republic in July 2001. According to these documents, Roma can exercise their right to educate their children in their mother tongue, use Romani in official communication, or ask for bilingual signs in the municipalities with more than 20% representation of this ethnic group (according to the last Census in 2001 there were 52 such municipalities in Slovakia). Roma themselves, however, do not require to exercise this act. The cause can be their unawareness, as well as their fear to exercise their right and to get into conflicts with the majority. The truth is that the representatives of the majority are not prepared for official communication in Romani, and there are no textbooks and books in schools” (translated by the authors).

In the present, in Slovakia all children with the Romani mother tongue attend schools with the Slovak, Hungarian, or Ruthenian language of instruction. The truth is that children must learn to communicate in the language of the school they attend. Children learn in a foreign language, which results in a slowdown of language and mental development.

Based on the findings, we recommend the parents of children whose mother tongue is Romani to enrol their children in kindergartens, preparatory years with the Slovak communication language, and try to minimize communication in Romani at home settings.

The level of the development of key competences is a base for further development in the following levels of education.

V. CONCLUSION

Our Slovak Republic is a multicultural country. Many national minorities such as the Hungarians, Roma, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Czechs, Polish, Bulgarians, Russians, Croatians, Germans, Jews, Moravians, Chinese, and Vietnamese live in our territory. There are the same rights and responsibilities for all nations and nationalities. The

Constitution of the Slovak Republic – the highest legal document grants the right of each individual to free education at state primary schools. Primary school in accordance with the principles and objectives of education promotes development of pupil's personality on the basis of the principles of humanism, equal treatment, tolerance, democracy and patriotism, given to intellectual, moral, ethical, esthetical, occupational and physical aspects. In school, by developing the communication skills, we contribute to the development of pupils' complex literacy. (Vanková, K., 2017) Furthermore, school provides elementary knowledge, skills and abilities in the language, natural science, social science, art, sport, health, and traffic areas, and other knowledge and skills necessary for pupils' orientation in life and society and their further education with the aim to increase their real chance for better future.

By our article, we point out that our society must promote all activities leading to prevention of failure in children with the Romani mother tongue in school environment with the Slovak language of instruction which is perceived as a foreign language by children whose mother tongue is Romani.

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