

REPORT

Preparation for the Education of Gypsy Children in Bulgaria

Hristo Kjuchukov

This report describes a curriculum based on modeled and minimized speech used in special classes intended to prepare children whose mother tongue is the Gypsy language to learn literary Bulgarian. It presents the results of a test designed to determine readiness for formal instruction in the Gypsy language.

The Gypsy population in Bulgaria numbers about 800,000. Almost all the Gypsies lead a settled life and their children attend Bulgarian schools together with the Bulgarian children. That is why many of the Bulgarian Gypsy children are bilingual. But this is not true bilingualism. That is to say, the Gypsy children know very little or no Bulgarian before they start school.

During the years of the totalitarian system this problem did not receive the attention due it. That is why we did not have any publications in the psychological, educational, or linguistic literature. The process of democratization has brought this problem to the forefront. In the past 20 years very few works on the education of Gypsy children were published in Bulgaria. Those published treated the matter from a practical point of view and were meant for teachers only. We still do not have complete research on the problem of bilingualism.

During the 1990-91 academic year an attempt was made to compile complete documentation about bilingual children through the formation of preparatory classes in the schools and through the creation of a curriculum, methodological literature, albums, and cards (Kjuchukov and Janakiev 1991; Kjuchukov et al. 1990; Kjuchukov 1990, 1991).

Hristo Kjuchukov is a post-graduate student in psycholinguistics at Sofia University. Mailing address: 3 Loznitza St., 9200 Provadia, Bulgaria.

The aim of these preparatory classes is to prepare bilingual children who do not know Bulgarian to learn it. As the children in Bulgaria start school at the age of 6, those who can not speak Bulgarian enroll in preparatory classes instead of in the first grade classes. There for one year they learn to speak Bulgarian, get to know the alphabet and numbers, learn math and learn to read and write. The Bulgarian language and linguistic phenomena are learned through the model phrase and the communication-speech approach (Ejubov et al. 1984; Michailova et al. 1976; Mirkova 1974; Vladimirova et al. 1985). All this is of course consistent with the age of the children.

In the preparatory class the communication-speech approach requires the children to learn literary Bulgarian through and for communication. This means not only speaking Bulgarian in front of the children, but using words and sentences especially addressed to the child. The child must be placed in the role of an interlocutor of the teacher, his classmate, or classmates.

Teaching is done in connection with a particular topic and in particular conditions, that is, always in a particular conversational situation. Therefore the proper organization of teaching in the preparatory class demands that the teacher make use of and create situations which stimulate the participation of the child in communication in Bulgarian, corresponding to the topic of conversation.

In his work the teacher in the preparatory class uses all the natural conversational situations (in and out of school, in organized observation and tours) which enable the pupils to learn typical Bulgarian expressions and phrases. Real and imaginary conversation situations are used in teaching. For the creation of real conversation situations one must use facts from the real life of the pupils, from family and everyday life, from their social and natural surroundings. To initiate an imaginary conversation use is made of characters from fairy tales, imaginary meetings, tours, expeditions, and so forth.

In the preparatory classes the Bulgarian language is learned as a complex whole. The phrase, as a building unit of the text—the conversation or the monologue—lies at the basis of the learning of the language. A precise sequence must be followed: text - phrase or sentence - word - sound. The phrase or sentence is derived from the text and then work is done on its meaning and structure. From the phrase one derives the word which is the subject of the learning with its lexical meaning, its grammatical form, its correct pronunciation and its possible combination with other words. From the word one derives the sound, or combination of sounds, the articulation of which is the object of learning.

The six-year-old children enter the preparatory classes with the ability to speak the Gypsy language in their everyday life. To master the Bulgarian language as a medium of learning and communication they have to get to know its system,

its regularity, to develop in themselves the ability to combine the elements of Bulgarian in phrases or sentences which are typical of communication in a particular conversational situation, to be able to use these phrases in the process of real communication. Modeling and minimizing speech helps to attain these goals.

Teaching through modeled speech provides the opportunity to introduce the syntactic constructions typical of communication in Bulgarian systematically and purposefully into the consciousness of the children and into their speech. It enables the selection of those constructions which are suitable for the purpose of the conversation, for the age of the pupils, and for their level of ability to communicate in Bulgarian. The communication-speech approach requires simultaneously introducing communicational and stimulating constructions and also the models of expression of attitude and of feelings.

Each syntactic construction, each Bulgarian speech model functions through model phrases and sentences or phrases typical of communication in a particular situation, in connection with a particular object, topic, and so forth. Teaching based on these models makes it possible in a particular syntactic construction to replace words with the same function or the same use. For example:

What is this?	This is a tomato
	an apple
	a book

Teaching in modeled speech can be effective only if the speech skills of the children in Bulgarian are formed in various activities, but based on the minimum number of words, phrases, and syntactic constructions necessary for their formation. When we speak of minimizing we mean limiting the number of stories, songs, and games. Their number should correspond to the age and speech abilities of the children to enable them to learn not only the meaning, but also the language form, which should not be a barrier to the enjoyment of their use.

The building up of skills in preparatory class children for communication in literary Bulgarian passes through several stages.

1. Initial stage. At this stage the child listens to Bulgarian expressions and connects them with the corresponding objects, signs, actions, and situations. This is a stage of passive participation in communication. An initial contact is made between an object and its Bulgarian name.

2. Imitational stage. Communication between the teacher and the child is accomplished by the initiative of the teacher, who asks a question and "gives" the answer which the child repeats or imitates.

3. The stage of initial speech reactions. At this stage the child begins to answer questions which demand a yes or no answer.

4. The stage of creative combination of the elements of the learned phrases when participating in communication. At this stage the children are taught to answer questions (to communicate) with complete and incomplete sentences. The incomplete sentences are the natural sentences used in dialogue. At the same time the children must learn to answer with complete sentences, so as to get ready for monologue speech.

Based on my observations and research, I have attempted to systematize some of the basic factors which help children who live in bilingual surroundings and who do not speak Bulgarian to learn literary Bulgarian in the preparatory classes, and have drawn the following conclusions:

1. In preparatory classes Bulgarian should be taught through modeled and minimized speech.

2. Teaching should begin with dialogue speech and in every lesson the teacher should prepare certain phrases which must be learned by the children.

3. The teacher should use visual methods when teaching monologue speech.

Up to now we have looked at one side of the question, preparation for education in the official language of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian language. But in some countries Gypsy children are also taught their mother tongue, the Gypsy language.

From March to May 1991 an experiment was implemented with 50 Gypsy children from the preparatory classes in Sofia, Provadia, and the village of Blaskovo in the Varna district. This experiment aimed at establishing the children's level of knowledge of their mother tongue, the Gypsy language, and their readiness to learn it in school.

The children were given a test containing questions in four main categories:

1. Does the child understand what is said to him? 2. Is the child aware of language units? 3. Can the child retell a text? 4. Preparation for writing. The tests were composed in three dialects, the Sofia dialect, the North-East dialect (for Provadia and Bansko), and the Kalderari dialect. The tests were constructed by the author, who is fluent in all three Gypsy dialects, and who administered the tests to each child individually.

A Test for Establishing the Level of Knowledge of the Mother (Gypsy) Tongue.

Version A. Kalderari Dialect

I. Does the child understand what is said to it?

1. Sar si ko alav?¹
2. Kozome brešengo san?
3. Sar si ke deyako alav?
4. So kerel buki ko dat?

II. Level of awareness of language units.

1. Djanes li gadjikanes?
2. Vaker mange ek gadjikano peras!
3. Puč ke amales mangel li te djan ando foro.
4. Pen mange kančik ke deyatar.

III. Listen to and retell the fairy-tale.

Sas thai sas ek phurano thai ek phurani. Von sas but čore. Ek give o phurano gelo ki len te astarel mačhen. Ki len astardas ek galbenosko mačho.

— Molinav man tuke phureya mug man ando pay. Me ka dav tut tu so manges.

Galisardas la o phurano, thai muklyas la ando pay.


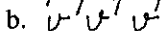
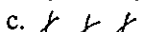
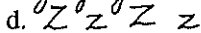
Sikadas o mačho po šoro andaro pay thai phendas:

— Del tut o del sastipe phureya! So manges te dav tut?

— Mangav e phuranyake thai mange ek nevo kher.

Kana gelotar peske o phurano, diklyas ek baro, šukar kher.

IV. Preparation for writing (identical in all versions)

- a. 
- b. 
- c. 
- d. 

Version B. Sofia Dialect

I. Does the child understand what is said to it?

1. Sar si to alav?
2. Sar si te deyakoto alav?
3. Kozome beršengero sinyan?
4. So kerel buti ko dadoro?

II. Level of awareness of language units.

1. Vaker mange yek дума!
2. Vaker i paš дума!
3. Vaker mange vareso te deyake!
4. Puč te amales mangel li de djan ando foro.

III. Listen to the story and retell it.

Sinyas ek phuro, thai ek phuri. On sinyas but čore. Ek dives o phuro gelo ki len te dolel mačšen. Ki len dolgyas ek zlatno mačšo.

— Molinav man tuke phureya, meg man ando pani. Me ka dav tut tu so manges.

Meklyas la o phuro ando pani. O mačšo das les yek kher.

Version C. North-East Dialect

I. Does the child understand what is said to it?

1. Sar sine to anav?
2. Sar sine te deyako anav?
3. Kač yasinda siyan?
4. So hazmetzi kerla to dad?

II. Level of awareness of language units.

1. Vaker mange yek peras!
2. Vaker mange i paš peras!
3. Vaker te diyatar uturm ek idos!
4. Puč te amales mangela ma te djan ando zis.

III. Listen to the story and retell it.

Siaslem bir vakita ek mami ekta ek papus. Ona siaslem but čore. Ek zis o puro giti te astarel balakoya. An paeste astardas ek altiesko balakos. O balakos vakerdas o papuske:

— Papu, muk man an paeste. Kan dav tuke so mangesa.

Mukas la o papus an paeste. O balakos dias les ek kher.

The experiment showed that:

1. The children understand the test which is in the local dialect. They understand part or nothing of the test in the Kalderari dialect.
2. They understand the questions from the first group.
3. They do not understand the questions from the second group which include abstract knowledge of the language (to name a word, to say a sentence).
4. The children are able to produce connected speech. They can retell the fairy tale in the Gypsy language. Ten children were able to retell the fairy tale in Bulgarian without difficulty after listening to it in the Gypsy language.
5. The children are prepared to learn the written language. They successfully write the elements of the different letters.
6. About ten children from the town of Provadia do not know the Gypsy language at all. They do not understand what is said to them and they cannot retell the fairy tale in the Gypsy language. These children speak and understand only Turkish.

At present a group of pedagogues and linguists are compiling a bilingual Gypsy-Bulgarian primer. An alphabet book for the dialects spoken in Bulgaria has already been created. Work on the manual has started as well. In this respect we take advantage of the experience of other countries—Finland, for example—and Cortiade's primer (Kurtiade 1990). However, the Bulgarian primer will be made to



help the children gain proficiency in the Gypsy language with the aid of Bulgarian and to gain proficiency in Bulgarian with the aid of the Gypsy language.

Notes

¹Translation:

I. 1. What is your name? 2. How old are you? 3. What is your mother's name?
4. What work does your father do?

II. 1. *Version A*. Do you know Bulgarian? (lit. 'non-Gypsy'). *Versions B, C*. Tell me a word! 2. *Version A*. Say a Bulgarian word to me! *Versions B, C*. Tell me a syllable! 3. Ask your comrade if he wants to go to the city. 4. Tell me something about your mother.

III. Once upon a time there were an old woman and an old man. They were very poor. One day the old man went by the river to fish. At the river he caught a golden fish.

Version A:

The fish said, "Please, old man, leave me in the water. I shall give you all you wish.

The old man felt sorry for her and let her go. The fish showed its head above the water and said, "May God give you health, old man! What do you want?"

"I want a new house for me and my old wife."

When he went back home, the old man saw a big beautiful house.

Version B:

"Please, old man, leave me in the water. I shall give you all you wish.

The old man left her in the water. The fish gave him a house.

Version C:

The fish said, "Please, old man, leave me in the water. I shall give you all you wish.

The old man left her in the water. The fish gave him a house.

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