

Thesis for the degree of doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.)

**Intercultural Analysis of Roma and Hungarian
Primary School Children's Language Usage from
Jászapáti**

Mászlainé Nagy Judit

Supervisor: Dr. Kis Tamás



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of Linguistics

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1. The objective of the dissertation, defining the topic

The aim of my dissertation is to map the pragmatic competence of Roma and Hungarian primary school children living in Jászapáti, with which I would like to help teachers in primary education, especially whose teaching methods are based on children's competence. The starting point of my analysis is the different language socialization background which explains the difference in Roma and Hungarian children's language usage (Réger 1990).

In the introduction part I give an outline about the following concepts: competence, culture and linguistic socialization. After that I outline the theoretical backgrounds which help to analyze oral and written intercultural language usage strategies.

During the sociopragmatic investigation, I was interested in what linguistic tools (pragmalinguistics) are used by members of a certain community (sociolinguistics) to reach their goals and what cultural world view lies behind the goals.

In the course of the analysis of *oral language usage* I concentrated on the development of interpersonal relationship between the two cultures. As a theoretical framework I chose Spencer-Oatey's (2000) rapport management, since this sociopragmatic approach gives an overall view to the investigation of the interaction functions of the discourse. Most of all, this model made the intercultural analysis possible as well.

According to Spencer-Oatey, in the following aspects of *pragmalinguistics* variations might occur among cultures:

1. *Pragmalinguistic conventions*: What type of strategies do individual cultural groups use to achieve certain goals and how they interpret them.
2. *Tools for rapport management strategies*: Not all strategies are present in every culture.
3. *Defining the contextual norms*: Two speakers from different cultures are related to power (P), social distance (D) and relative imposition (P) in a different way during their discourse.¹

The following components can be listed under the scope of sociopragmatic research, focusing on interpersonal relationships:

1. *Sociopragmatic conventions*: This is about the interactional motivations of speakers that lie behind the surface of linguistic forms in certain contexts. People from different cultures stick to different principles in their interpersonal communication. These principles are the Sociopragmatic Interactional Principles (SIP) which are the following: a) face management b) rights and obligations c) fulfilling the task (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang 2003: 1638).
2. *Fundamental cultural values*: Cross-cultural psychology has identified a small number of universal dimensions of cultural values. It found that ethnolinguistic groups differ from each other in terms of which dimension they choose. During the research I mention the appearance of individualistic-collectivist social values in the society.

According to the theory mentioned above, I searched the answer for the following questions with the help of role-play dialogues and additional questions:

¹ P (power): the speaker and the hearer's relative power

D (distance): social distance between the hearer and the speaker

R (relative imposition): the relative hierarchy of imposition within the culture

1. During social interaction what pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic differences are present in young school children at the beginning of elementary school education (1st grade)? More precisely: What are the typical strategies applied by both cultures? What situations alter the usage frequency of linguistic methods? How do different partners influence strategy choice? What sociopragmatic interactional principles lie behind the strategy choice?
2. How do the questions in point one alter after the answers of fourth grade students?
3. With the development of pragmatic competence, how does language usage differ in the two cultures?

Besides the previous questions I was also interested in the *discourse patterns* of language usage as well, so in another chapter I investigated those characteristics of conversations that might be the cause of the difference in both cultures. These are the followings (Cheng 2003):

1. preference organization in connection with disagreements
2. simultaneous talk
3. managing, shaping the topic of discourse
4. discourse information structure

Beyond the differences in oral language usage I also searched an answer, why do Roma children have difficulties in literacy. At this point the base of my assumption was that the role of written language in Roma children's socialization plays little role. In this chapter I give an answer what strategies characterize written and oral language usage in elementary school children's compositions (Hansen 1998; Givón 1979; Ochs 1979; Chafe 1982). I also give an answer if these strategies support my thesis that Roma children have difficulty in written skills due to the cultural background.

I started my research by separating oral and written criteria. After that I investigated traces of logical patterns about sentence structure and addressee in elementary school children's compositions on the basis of theoretical background (mostly Kernya). As a starting point from the typical characteristics of a narrative genre, I used Labov and Waletzky's (1967) variation theory as a frame to find a global cohesion in the texts, as well as the link among narrative sentences in compositions. At the end, I focused on the principles suggested by Labov that deals with how much effort does the composition writer put on to keep the reader's point of view in mind. I identified more clearly with the help of this aspect system the written and oral language peculiarities, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Therefore, I considered the presence of logical patterns, the majority of subordinate sentences, the explicit connection of narrative sentences, the presence of introduction and final part in compositions (global cohesion), and the intensifying- comparative parts as strategies of written skills. On the contrary, I identified the lack of logical traits, the lack of proportions in text, the topic related storytelling, the lack of introduction and final part, and the frequent lack of certain appraising elements (repetition, straightforward talk, interpretation) with typical oral strategies.

After reviewing the differences in language usage I would like to give some suggestions about how the results may be *implemented in the curriculum*, in the last chapter. As my thesis is about a linguistic subject, I only touch upon the practical implementations.

2. Drafting the applied methods

2.1. Comparing role-play dialogues

During my research among elementary school children, I decided to investigate a group consisting of 30 students. Out of the group, there were 15 Roma language speaking, 15 Hungarian language speaking first grade students. Both boys and girls are mixed. For a day, I choose 4-5 students each to play a dialogue. I recorded the conversations on a tape and put down notes about the strategies (utterances) they used in reaction with the offence. During the research, each student had to participate in 15 situations all together. According to the nature of violating the social norms I distinguished 15 speech acts within 5 topics. The topics were the followings: 1. damage of property, 2. do not fulfill a task, 3. lie to someone 4. take someone else's property, 5. hurt someone physically. Within each topic, I distinguished 3 speech acts according to the different partners in the conversation. In connections with the topic, the students had to play these speech acts in different situations.

For the sake of developing the speech act, the listener or the offended role was always played by the same person. This person was a well known, loved teacher among children, so the children did not feel frustrated in the situation. Although, there were cases when balance between the listener and the offended was lost. We also pre-recorded such dialogues when the partner was an 'authentic' person. So the real scenario of the speech acts became available. Later on, the listener shaped the dialogues on the basis of that scenario. To evoke the strategies in a realistic way there were pictures available for each situation, so the children could imagine the given situation. Before the dialogues the elementary schoolchildren took a look at the pictures. After their partner uttered the first word, the role-play began. In the case of first grade students, the partner was played with the help of puppets.

The dialogues created with the role-play situations were suitable to recall strategies from children that were acquired during the socialization process. These strategies, following and completing² the Olshtain-Cohen (1983) formula are the followings:

1. 1.a.a Expressing shame (e.g. I feel ashamed)
 - 1.a Expressing sorrow (I'm sorry)
 - 1.b Asking for forgiveness (Excuse me)
 - 1.c Apologizing (I apologize for..., sorry, excuse me)
2. 2.a Confessing the fault (It's my fault)
 - 2.a Refusing to confess the fault (It's not my fault, It's yours)
 - 2.b Admitting self-mistake (It's my fault, because I didn't pay attention)
 - 2.c Recognizing that the partner deserves apology (You're right)
 - 2.d Lack of deliberate action (I didn't mean it, it was an accident)
- 2 Refusing responsibility (I didn't do it)
3. Explanation (I did this, because...)
4. Offering correction (I will make it right)
5. Promise for future avoidance (I won't do it again)
6. Expressing perplexity (I don't know what to say)
7. Reflecting on the relationship between the parties (Are we still friends?)

² Additional category is the Szili study's (Szili 2003: 297) being ashamed category (1.a.a), not admitting responsibility (-2), not admitting fault (-2.a), expressing perplexity (6), reflecting on the relationship between the speakers (7), the lack of reflecting on the relationship between the speakers (-7), passing on the problems to other parties (8) and the distraction (9).

- 7. The lack of reflecting on the relationship between the parties
- 8. Passing on the problem (It's not my fault but yours)
- 9. Distraction, avoiding responsibility (do not talk about the misdeed, but something else)

The world view behind the strategy choice was identified by follow-up questions. (Who were you afraid of most? Who is closer to you? Which offence do you think is the most serious? Why did you decide to apologize?) The first three questions follow Brown and Lewinson's (1978) social interactional variables. The first question asks about the social hierarchy, power distance (P), the second asks about social distance (D), and the third asks about individual ranking of the particular imposition. The answers³ for these questions, together with the strategies give an explanation for pragmalinguistic phenomena. The last, fourth, question was in connection with the children's cultural beliefs. The answers for these questions were later put into the following five categories:

- 1. Self face management (B)
- 2. Dealing with other's face (H)
- 3. Trying to keeping ground (B-H)
- 4. Expectations (E)
- 5. Giving a hint for the topic (T)

2.2.Participating in the conversation

Apart from the role-play method (Máslainé 2007, 2008a, 2008b), we need authentic dialogues for conversation analysis that can not be developed in an artificial environment. From the investigation's point of view it was important to have adequate quantity of dialogues available, and if they take place in a school environment the topic should be about school. In the research, we sit two elementary school student together (the same child participated in two dialogues: once with a student from the same cultural background, the second time with a different cultural background student) whose task was to plan the last day at school. The recordings took place few days before the end of the school year, so it was an up-to-date topic for everyone. All together, 20 elementary school students from Jászapáti participated in 2-2 situations. The children got a task previously to write down their thoughts what they plan for the last day at school. They got few minutes for this task, and then got another instruction to get to an agreement about the plan. First, the students negotiated about their thoughts, then planned and wrote down the exact scenario of the last school day. During their conversation there was a dictaphone on the table, and were not disturbed by a third party.

I encoded the text of the dialogues by Schiffrin's (1994) transcription signs and collected the patterns. Therefore the pragmalinguistic investigation of parlance became available. After listening to the recorded dialogues the children filled out a questionnaire, so I could reveal the sociopragmatic conventions and investigated attitude.

2.3.Examining the narrative compositions

With the help of narration, language usage can be ranked according to communicational aspects (Kernya 1988: 68). Similarly to Kernya Róza, who investigated elementary school children's compositions, I also gave an instruction for the students to write a narrative composition to a teacher who does not teach in their class, with the title of "I had a

³ In the scale, we had to determine the rank of parent, friend and the teacher.

great experience”. More precisely, I asked a teacher preliminary to tell the students to write a composition with this title for her. I did not determine the topic, only the genre: it should be a narrative composition. The compositions in my research were written by school children (24 Hungarian and 24 Roma) at the beginning of 4th grade which means that they were already familiar with the rules of text formation and the genre of narration.

3. Listing the results as thesis

In the followings, I would like to summarize the results reflecting on intercultural differences which give answers to the question at the beginning of the chapter.

3.1. Relationship strategies at the beginning of elementary school-age

1. Strategies favored by Hungarians: 1.a, 1.c, 2.a, 3, 5, 9, -2.a, Strategies favored by Romas: 1.a.a, 1.b, -2, 2.c, 2.d, 6.

2. Situations altering the frequency of language strategies are “damage of property” and “do not fulfill a task” in case of Hungarians. In case of Roma children, altering the situations altering language strategies were “lie to someone” and “take someone else’s property”. The exceptional role of these situations reflects different cultural world views in both cultures. As my aim was to investigate the sociopragmatic aspects of the strategies, I did not give an explanation for the cultural background differences.

3. After the pragmalinguistic investigations I got the following conclusions: the majority of strategies applied by Hungarian children take place mostly in the conversations with the teacher, although Roma children prefer strategies involving a friend and their mother. Roma children turn to “their people” with a wide variety of language usage, although Hungarian children use more sophisticated strategy in the conversation with a teacher. In case of Hungarians, the more sophisticated strategy choice can be followed by the P, D, and R parameters, which means that they apply more strategies towards a person from who are more afraid, have a larger social distance and the effect of violation is more serious. But it seems that in case of Romas, there are no such relationship between strategy choice and context. With other words: they do not choose strategies according to extreme parameters. At this point our assumption seems to be right that the disadvantage of Roma children in connection with foreigners lays in the difference of strategy choice.

4. Sociopragmatic strategies at the beginning of elementary school children age can be connected mostly to face saving. In the role-play with the mother, the Hungarian children saved their own face mostly, but during the task *they respected the other parties face* as well. On the contrary, referring to the topic played an important role in Roma children. It was obvious that Roma children considered keeping *social relationships* of utmost importance, but in Hungarian children taking care of the partner’s face was also frequent. Romas tended to *save their own face* in an encounter the teacher, but Hungarians tried to save the *partner’s face* in more cases as well.

5. The maxims of politeness (Leech 1983) behind the strategy choice, collected in the following chart:

	Hungarian	Roma
Friend	1.c, 1.a: the generosity maxim 5: the tact maxim 7: the sympathy maxim	-2: maintaining relationship 1.a.a, 2.b, 2.d: the tact and sympathy maxim 3: the agreement maxim 4: the tact maxim
Teacher	1.a, 1.c,: considering partner's face, the generosity maxim 5, 2.a, 3: the tact, modesty and agreement maxims 9: avoiding responsibility	2.d, 6: saving self-face 2.d, 1.a.a, 2.b: sympathy, and tact maxims
Parent	5, 2.b, 3: the tact, modesty and agreement maxims 1.a: the generosity maxim	2.d: the sympathy maxim

It is also visible from the following chart that the IFID strategies characterize Hungarians more in case of maintaining a good relationship, the strategies of number 2, which are about taking responsibility, are preferred tools of Romas.

3.2. Investigating the development of pragmatic competence in case of elementary school children

1. It shows an increasing tendency that children with more complex pragmatic competence apply simultaneously more and more complex strategies to maintain social relationships. This phenomenon can be explained with a sociopsychological background, with the advancement of age, social relations became an important element in communication. It is an interesting index of progress that children by 10 prefer to use -2.a, 8 and 9 strategies that are the signs of responsibility "transformation". By the age of 10, they realize that they can form the events as well, and it is also reflected in their language usage. But it is another question, that these strategies are considered as bad methods of apologizing, thus they do not consider the deliberate fact of manipulation, which means that their moral judgment is still strong.

2. I appoint that, in the development period, Hungarians prefer to use strategies 1.b, 4 and 5, peculiar with adults. Romas prefer to use 2.d category, which is about taking responsibility. Among the typical categories applied by Romas, we found many that are considered to be a bad strategy by themselves. This reflects a discrepancy between expectations and real life language usage. This information implies that pedagogy should pay an attention to the pragmatic development of Romas at this stage. With other words, the pragmalinguistic factors should be connected to sociopragmatic factors in the language usage of Romas towards foreigners.

3. In case of Hungarians the „hurt someone physically” situation turned the proportion of the strategies among fourth grade students. In case of Romas, the proportion remained the one that was in first grade; the “lie to someone” and “not fulfilling a task” was added. This result also proved that children consider more and more aspects during the process of pragmatic development, and they separate moral and social violations, with the advancement of age. The mentioned situations are considered to be more complex by both cultures, and this causes dubiousity in case of strategy usage.

4. When in investigating the role of the partner, I got interesting results from both cultures. Elementary school aged Hungarians used many and more complex strategies with teachers and parents, on the other hand, Romas used them in the interaction with friends.

5. The figures indicate that Hungarians connects larger authority distance and more serious violations to the politeness components, whereas Romas on the contrary, connect more polite strategies to less extreme parameters. In case of pragmatic development, we can conclude that with the development of pragmatic competence the individual pragmalinguistic factors and their strategies are more and more in a balance. For example, the apologizing strategies will be the markers of polite language usage.

6. According to the development of sociopragmatic principles, we can draw a conclusion that in the process of development, in Hungarians' strategic choice expectations and the partner's consideration play a major role. This means that the maxim of generosity and tact are related. In case of Romas, it turned out from the post-questions that their strategic choice was related to their own face management, or with the topic. Romas often consider the maxims of modesty and sympathy, but due to their priority in face management, they often use impolite strategies as well.

7. With the development of pragmatic competence, Hungarians changed their IFID strategies parallel with the increase of their social sensitivity. As the Romas answered to social factors, they lacked to follow the conventional strategy types considered by Hungarians.

8. Assuming that we connect strategies of elementary school children to Leech's maxims (1983), by the end of elementary school age the following pattern is developed:

	Hungarian	Roma
<i>Friend</i>	1.c, 1.a: the generosity maxim 2.b: maxim of modesty 5: the tact maxim	2.a: maxim of modesty 2.d, 7: the sympathy maxim 6, 8: omitting the maxims
<i>Teacher</i>	1.b: the generosity maxim 3: the agreement maxim 4, 5: the tact maxim	2.b: the tact maxim -2, -2.a, 6, 9: omitting the maxims of politeness
<i>Parent</i>	1.c: the generosity maxim 4, 5: the tact maxim	1.b: the generosity maxim 2.d: the sympathy maxim -2.a, 6: omitting the maxims of politeness

3.3. Intercultural analysis of elementary school children's language usage according to conversation participation

1. In the investigation of disagreement I found out that Hungarians tend to disagree with Romas more often and they frequently flout the maxims of 'disagreement with recovery' and 'indirect agreement' strategies. But in those dialogues where children had to plan the last day at school, strategy choice shows a different picture. Hungarians applied the "bare disagreement" strategies quite frequently when they interacted with Romas. Comparing to

Romas, Hungarians expressed their disagreement more frequently (80: 58). In the investigation of disagreement it seems that Hungarians tend to disagree with Romas more often and they frequently flout the maxim of politeness.

2. The investigation of simultaneous talk proved that Hungarians tend to skip the maxim of politeness, in case of Romas, the maxim of approval dominates. Comparing dialogues from similar cultures, Hungarians applied more simultaneous talk and kept the turn. In the Roma-Hungarian dialogues I counted more simultaneous talks from Roma speakers. They started the simultaneous talk, but gave the right of speech to the partner.

3. I found the intercultural difference of handling the discourse, mostly in the orientation of the discourse topic. The starting strategy of the topic pointed on the fact that Hungarians give suggestions to organize the program more frequently. In comparison to Romas, they concentrate more on the task, even in those cases when they turn to the listener, it is in favor of the task. Romas tend to shape their speech acts to the previous topic that is manifested in agreements and repetitions. In the background of managing the discourse topic, the sociopragmatic principles are not connected to the maxims of politeness, but to the different notions of the discourse. With the help of sociopragmatic interactional principles we can explain, that face saving is more important for Romas, and task fulfillment is more important for Hungarians.

4. In connection with discourse patters, I investigated the informational structure of information of the discourse. From the conventions of strategy usage, we can conclude that Romas prefer indirect strategies to direct strategies. This peculiarity can be found mostly in the different argumentation methods. Hungarians argue with affirmative sentences in a direct way, but Romas use indirect strategies to convince, in the form of question or exclamation sentences. Besides indirect argumentation strategies, the inductive patterns of Romas are well illustrated with the kidding as well.

5. From the answers of the questionnaire, it turned out that both cultures consider Hungarian speech and language usage to be better. The Roma elementary school children's attitude in Jászapáti is positive to their Hungarian school mates.

3.4. Intercultural analysis of elementary school children's compositions

After analyzing the compositions of elementary school children, we can draw a conclusion that the expected linear and global cohesion patterns in compositions do not succeed properly in Roma children's compositions. So the sentences of the text are not related to each other, there is not enough information in the compositions for global understanding (e.g.: there are too many implications) and part of the narration is frequently missing. With other words, the linear and global cohesive elements required for a written narrative composition are not present.

In the subject requirements of the curriculum the importance of using discourses to make the text more life-like is highlighted. It seems that the reason why Roma story telling is more interesting for the reader is, that they use oral language strategies during text creation. These strategies are, for example, repetition, straightforward talk and frequent explanatory parts. Despite these strategies, the lack of cohesive devices makes Roma children's compositions difficult to read.

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