

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

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.

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.

I evoked the social interactional strategies among elementary school children with role-play method. 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. During the research, each student had to participate in 15 situations all together, depending on which social norm was violated. The dialogues created with the role-play situations were suitable to recall strategies¹ from children that were acquired during the socialization process. I managed to identify the world view behind the strategy choice with follow-up questions.

Investigating the strategies of social interactions among Roma and Hungarian children, we can draw a conclusion that after violating a maxim they care about face saving the most, from the sociopragmatic principles. Roma children's strategy choice concentrated mostly on the self-face saving, on the other hand, in case of Hungarians the partner and other expectations also played major role. Besides this fact, we also concluded that Hungarian's polite language usage are indicated with IFID-strategies (expressing shame, expressing sorrow, asking for forgiveness, apologizing), in the case of Roma's, the subcategories of category 2. (confessing the fault, refusing to confess the fault, admitting self-mistake, recognizing that the partner deserves apology, lack of deliberate action, refusing responsibility) indicate it. It is also a very important remark that Hungarians used many and more complex strategies with teachers and parents, on the other hand, Romas used them in the interaction with friends. Besides that, Roma children applied -2 (refusing responsibility), -2.a (refusing to confess the fault), 6 (expressing perplexity) and 9 (distraction, avoiding responsibility) strategies more frequently with teachers; the strategies they consider a bad solution for apologizing. In the investigation of developing pragmatic competence, I found out that children by fourth grade apply more and more complete strategies to maintain their social relations. By the age of ten, they prefer to use responsibility transforming strategies.

Besides the previous questions I was also interested in the discourse patterns of language usage as well, so in another chapter I investigated the following patterns in conversations (Cheng 2003): 1. preference organization in connection with disagreements 2. simultaneous talk 3. managing, shaping the topic of discourse 4. discourse information structure.

Apart from the role-play method, discourse analysis required authentic conversations. In the research, we sit two elementary school students together who were given preliminary

¹ The strategies follow the Olshtain-Cohen model (1983)

instructions to plan the last day at school. All together, 20 elementary school students from Jászapáti participated in 2-2 situations (with a partner from identical and different cultural background). To reveal the sociopragmatic conventions and to investigate attitude, I created a questionnaire which was filled out by the children after the conversation.

In the investigation of disagreement I found out that Hungarians tend to disagree with Romas more often and they frequently flout the maxim of politeness². The investigation of simultaneous talk proved that Hungarians tend to skip the maxim of politeness, in case of Romas the maxim of approval dominates. Hungarians were more frequently the originators of simultaneous talk. Comparing to the Romas, Hungarians more frequently kept the turn. As the topic handling, I assumed that the function of language usage in Hungarians, when planning the last day, was information exchange. But in Romas, the function of language usage was mostly interpersonal interaction. In the investigation of discourse patters, it turned out that Romas prefer indirect strategies, for example argument and teasing.

Beyond the differences in oral language usage I also searched an answer, why do Roma children have difficulties in *literacy*. 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.

I gave instructions to 4th grade students (24 Hungarian and 24 Roma) to write a narrative composition to a teacher who does not teach in their class, with the title of "I had a great experience". I did not determine the topic, only the genre: it should be a narrative composition.

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. Although, in the subject requirements 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.

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.

Cheng, Winnie (2003): *Intercultural Conversation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Kernya Róza (1988): *A szöveg néhány sajátossága a kisiskolások fogalmazásaiban*. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó.

Labov, William & Waletzky, Joshua (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In: Helm June (ed.): *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Leech, Geoffrey (1983): *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman.

Olshtain, Elite & Cohen, Andrew D. (1983): Apology: A speech act set. In: Wolfson, Nessa & Judd, Elliot (eds.): *Sociolinguistics and Language Aquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen (2000): *Culturally speaking: managinng rapport through talk across cultures*. London and New York: Continuum.

² See: Geoffrey Leech (1983) maxim of politeness