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Teaching the Romani language for intercultural purposes

Streszczenie: W artykule podjęto rozważania dotyczące nauczania języka romskiego studentów – przyszłych nauczycieli tego języka w Bułgarii. Język romski jest ojczystym językiem wielu dzieci romskich. Są one przygotowywane w rodzinach i przedszkolach do uczenia się dwóch języków równoległe – ojczystego romskiego oraz bułgarskiego. Po dokonaniu analizy literatury naukowej z zakresu edukacji międzykulturowej w Bułgarii i w Europie autor zamieszcza krótką prezentację metodologii używania filmów wideo w procesie nauczania w szkole podstawowej oraz dokonuje oceny roli tychże filmów w rozwoju mowy dzieci romskich w obu językach.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja międzykulturowa, język romski, język ojczysty, filmy wideo

Introduction

Teaching the Romani language as a mother tongue in Bulgarian schools was introduced in the early 1990s by a resolution of the Council of Ministers along with Hebrew, Turkish and Armenian recognized also as mother tongues. These four languages: Armenian, Hebrew, Romani and Turkish are officially recognized as minority languages in Bulgaria. Languages such as Greek, Macedonian and Romanian are not recognized as minority languages, and therefore are not taught in Bulgarian schools.

Teaching Romani language has been carried out in the context of a vague policy of the Ministry of Education up to date. After the introduction of education in Romani in the early 1990s and initial euphoria followed by the change of the government and the Minister of Education, the attitude towards the study of the Romani language changed in the late 1990s despite the fact that there were about 100 freelance teachers of Romani and about 5,000 Roma children studying their mother tongue. Then the Minister

of Education decided that Roma in Bulgaria do not need to learn their mother tongue and education in Romani was actually suspended in spite of the fact that it was established and allowed by the necessary documents.

The program “Primary school pedagogy and Romani language” was opened in St. Cyril and Methodius University in Veliko Tarnovo in 2003. It was oriented towards the preparation of future full-time teachers of primary classes, who could also teach Romani using the model “Primary school pedagogy and the English language”, “Primary school pedagogy and the Russian language” and etc. Curricula and programs of specialty were identical with the curricula and programs of other specialties with a foreign language. The idea of introducing this new specialty was to support the learning of the Bulgarian language through the study of the children’s native language. There the children had the opportunity to expand knowledge in their native language and to learn Bulgarian at the same time. This program was closed because of political reasons in 2010. I am not going to discuss the reasons of it as it was examined in a special monograph (Kyuchukov, 2018). During its existence the program has accumulated positive experience and has become popular in Europe and in the world as it was the only one of this kind. Later the model of this program was used by the Council of Europe in order to create a program of school mediators in Europe.

In 2018 the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Bulgaria issued an instruction on the publication of textbooks and teaching books in the Romani language, although there are no teachers in the country who have the right to teach Romani as a mother tongue. Most of the former students of this program emigrated after graduation and unsuccessful attempts of self-realization in Bulgaria. They live and work in European countries. The other few teachers with the right to teach Romani as a mother tongue (they have got the specialty “Primary school pedagogy and the Romani language”) work in different fields. Only few, no more than five throughout the country, work as full-time primary school teachers.

Romani language teachers and intercultural education

Roma university students (future teachers of Romani language) were intensively trained not only in linguistics, pedagogy, psychology but also in the following two areas:

- pedagogical communication,
- intercultural competence.

Roma children are characterized by their bilingualism / multilingualism and biculturalism / multiculturalism. As it is shown in the research of neurolinguists, bilinguals have an excellent structure of the cerebral cortex and differences in the structure of neural networks due to the presence of two or three language systems. Their bilingualism is natural, and Roma children grow up in a situation of daily communication in two or three languages. In most cases children of ethnic Bulgarians are monolingual or they learn a foreign language (German, English, Spanish), but they are not absorbed in the language environment of the second language and learn it from 2 to 4 hours a week. It means that teaching these two groups of children, even in their own language, requires different teaching methods. That is why teachers should take this linguistic difference into consideration in their pedagogical communication.

Duisembekova and Iskakova (2013, p. 243) define pedagogical communication as a complex and multifaceted process of teacher-student interaction. A student must have a positive attitude to the educational process only in this case the process can be effective. According to the authors pedagogical communication involves the following teacher's skills: a) fast and rapid orientation in the changing conditions of communication; b) proper planning and implementation of speech effects; c) search for adequate means of communication, appropriate to the characteristics of students; d) constant contact in communication. These skills are not a given, the teacher must master them in teaching.

According to Leontiev (1995) there are two types of students in pedagogical communication.

The first type is communicative, which is characterized by initiative in communication, easy speech understanding, predominance of acoustic apparatus, a large volume of generated speech.

The second type is cognitive-linguistic with passivity in communication, difficulty in understanding speech, a small amount of generated speech.

According to the author these two types of pupils are born with these differences and they cannot be changed by a teacher or by a student him/herself. Taking into consideration these peculiarities a teacher forms a type of communication with the students so knowledge of the characteristics of one or another type is obligatory.

Sedova (2013) defines competences and the competence of language teachers as two very important professional characteristics. Competences according to Sedova (2013, p. 428) present a set of knowledge and skills generating willingness to carry out professional activities in any situation. Competence is

a set of formed competences that make up the professionalism of a specialist in a particular field of activity. Hristozova (2009, p. 42) says that “linguistic competence” is an element of “communicative competence”. The author states that “the awareness of a language as a system with its connections and sub-systems means understanding the need to study it also in a certain system” (p. 42). Dimchev (2011) asserts that the expected result of language training is “the formation of educated individuals with a system of competences according to age characteristics and needs for social implementation. Among these competencies an important role belongs to communicative speech competence (perception, creation and transformation of texts) then linguistic/linguistic competence (understanding of basic linguistic concepts, such as a text, a sentence, a word, a morpheme... – from the point of view of their educational value and pragmatic orientation) and cultural competence” (p. 4).

Intercultural competence of a teacher is determined by the fact that native Romani language teacher must teach children in their native language but in a cultural environment different from a family one. In this new environment children should learn the works of literature which are simultaneously studied in two languages: Bulgarian and Romani. According to Pruha (2010, 2011) lectures on multicultural education should be included into the process of training for future teachers who will work with Roma children and these teachers should learn cultural characteristics of this ethnic group. This knowledge, in his opinion, is necessary for intercultural communication with students to make the learning process effective.

Nunev (2009) defines the following characteristics of teacher’s intercultural competence:

- knowledge in the field of intercultural communication,
- knowledge of history and culture of various ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities,
- knowledge of discrimination,
- knowledge in the field of equality of rights and opportunities for all children,
- understanding bilingualism and art to take linguistic abilities into consideration and etc.

The ideas of effective pedagogical communication and intercultural communication are the part of every day work for future teachers of native Romani language. Students get not only professional training in pedagogy but also obtain the skills of communication in intercultural environment using different means for it. Their preparation for work with bilingual children and

taking into consideration the peculiarities of bilingualism are main requirements in work with the native Romani language.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to observe how the use of educational video films (in Romani and in Bulgarian) created by Roma university students, can influence the language education process of Roma children in primary classes during the practical lessons of the University students with Roma children.

My hypotheses is that the educational video films do help children to develop both languages they study.

The methods used in the study are observations and analyses of recorded lessons of University students with the Roma children during their practical lessons in primary classes.

Educational video films – method for language learning of bilingual children

Studying the program “Primary school pedagogy and Romani language” the university students were forced to create didactic materials themselves as there were practically no materials of that kind. They used their creations in the classroom during the training practice when they taught Romani language. One of the popular methods (along with many others) was the production of fairy tales from Bulgarian and Roma folklore and creating educational video films. The students chose the roles, found costumes for their characters and heroes, find the music... The video recordings happened in the classrooms of the University in Veliko Tarnovo.

Teaching the Romani language is based on the principles of bilingualism (Romani and Bulgarian languages are used) and is aimed at the development of two language systems. The films are recorded in the Romani or Bulgarian language and it allows the pupils watching the film in one language to try to translate it into the other language, that fact definitely puts the children in a situation of need to use his/her knowledge in both languages. Hereby the mother tongue is getting richer and it also helps to understand and learn Bulgarian grammatical categories better.

Working with educational video films was an attractive method of increasing children’s interest in language learning and in educational process in general. It was conducted according to the following methodology:

- showing the whole video which lasts from 3 to 5 minutes,
- a brief conversation about the content of a video,
- repeating the video in order to divide it into parts,
- giving the titles to the parts, putting down the new vocabulary for each part in the Romani and Bulgarian languages,
- if the film is in Bulgarian, the children translate it into Romani, and if it is in Romani, they translate it into Bulgarian,
- retelling the film by some children in both languages using the new vocabulary,
- summing up the results of watching video, establishing the links with different kinds of art (to come up with music for a video film, to make illustrations, etc.).

The next lesson starts with the same video and its retelling in both languages. Speech errors are corrected and commented by a teacher. The next important point in the work with any video is its dramatization which imitates the performance of actors from the video.

Using this method of learning has several advantages:

- children enrich the vocabulary of both languages having fun (watching video)
- children are motivated to use the new vocabulary in complex syntactical structures and in the creation of appropriate oral / written text
- children connect new knowledge of the language (Romani/Bulgarian) with different kinds of art.

In order to be effective in the teaching process through video films, the teacher must have good pedagogical communication skills and high intercultural competence. It must arouse the interest of children to watch videos and to create preconditions for retelling and descriptions in both languages. It is necessary to create a situation in which children could enjoy conversation and writing. According to Stefanova (1998, p. 23) “learning content is learned through play and speech and language is studied as a mean of communication and as a mean of learning”.

Borisova (1992, pp. 24–25) defines the key activity in the system of work in speech development. According to her, “a person communicates with the others not through individual words and sentences, but through a holistic speech, i.e. text. The text shows the degree of proficiency in the vocabulary of a speaker or a writer. The text reveals the possibilities of the author in the selection of accurate and correct syntactic constructions. Mastery of the lexical richness of the language takes place through the text (reading or listening). Different versions

of syntactic structures are also opened through the text. In other words speech activity at lexical and syntactic levels is comprehended through the work with the text. Not the work on a single word or a single sentence (as speech units) determines the success of a teacher in students' speech development but his/her ability to show these words and phrases in the text in order for children to understand their use in terms of holistic statements and use them in their speech activities”.

Conclusion

Intercultural competence is important for the work of future teachers of Romani as a mother tongue. In the process of teaching it educational videos are a good basis for the formation of oral and written speech in both languages. The performance of artists, costumes, music for the video (even if they are performed unprofessionally by Roma students) encourage Roma children to have oral and written communication using syntactic structures with new vocabulary and to generate connected text. This happens both in Bulgarian and in Romani. During the game children learn to use both languages to communicate and gain new knowledge.

Students, future teachers of the Romani language, mastered the skills of communication with children taking into consideration the peculiarities of their bilingualism in the process of their education in the program “Pedagogy of primary school and the Romani language”. Educational videos are a good method of intercultural education and formation of intercultural competence for children learning the native Romani language as they allow children to enrich knowledge of their own culture and get new information about the Bulgarian culture.

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Abstract: The article deals with teaching Romani to university students – future teachers of the Romani language in Bulgaria. Romani language is a mother tongue to many Roma children. In the families and in the kindergartens they are prepared to learn two languages simultaneously – the native Romani and Bulgarian. Having analyzed the scientific literature on intercultural education in Bulgaria and Europe the author briefly presents the methodology of using video films in the educational process at primary school and evaluates the role of the video films in the speech development of Roma children in both languages.

Keywords: intercultural education, Romani language, mother tongue, video films

Translated by Hristo Kyuchukov