



Gypsy children's language socialization and its effects on school failures

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ABSTRACT

Low educational attainment, early truancy from school and separated education in school (segregation) of Gypsies and their poor academic career count to be a tradition in the Hungarian education system. Mainly due to this and the lack of marketable skills, the active Gypsy inhabitants became the biggest loser of the political transformation and they were excluded from the labour market after introducing market economy, additionally, they fell behind hopelessly and became unemployed permanently. The study represents all the language socialization difficulties that are usually presenting since early childhood and produce the early school failures in early childhood, furthermore, they contribute early dropping out of school or hinder their secondary school education thereby contributing to the continuous reproduction of the disadvantages in labour market and to the maintenance of social exclusion.

Keywords

Minority; Gypsy; language socialization; school failure; unemployment; exclusion

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INTRODUCTION

The real losers of the political transformation are the Roma people. During the past hundred year history, the Gypsy people lost their financial basis the second time by the political transformation.

However, while in the first half of the XX. century the disintegration of traditional professions were slow evolutionary process, lasting for decades which to the Roma could adapt, the mass unemployment, resulted from the political transformation, nullified rapidly all the achievement of that slow modernization process, which could have integrated them by expanding basic educational and expanding industrial workplaces that do not require qualifications, even if this integration would have been on the lowest level of the social hierarchy in a system of a modern society. The massive job loss is long gone. By the collapse of social economy, the value of eight-grade education vanished and huge proportion of previously integrated people got out of the society within a few years. The incredible fast collapse of liveable lifestyle did not allow the majority of Roma to find adaptation form over livelihood. Furthermore, the longer time the gypsies spend in their currents state, the stronger the vicious circle of poverty-being uneducated-unemployment is expected to be. The collapse of Roma employment resulted in massive impoverishment and thousands of Roma families sinking heavily under the standard of social livelihood are heavily responsible of the schooling education chances developed for the following generations.

The educational catching up for Roma children stalled in the middle of the 80's when the first signs of employment crisis had been shown. The situation has been deteriorating since that. The falling behind of Roma children compared to the majority population has been dramatically increased compared to the situation in 1993 which was otherwise a very bad situation. Today, the indicators show that the schooling progression of the successive generation is interrupted. Every trend of the present Hungarian society reinforces the following: the unskilled labour force continuously losing its value on the labour market, the employment policies' nature of incapability of getting over providing passive aids, the social policy is unable to do anything against poverty, the intolerance of middle-class towards the poor and Roma people, school segregation.

One of the most neuralgic points is the question of secondary school education. Roma people have the biggest drawbacks regarding it. The Hungarian society after the political transformation created its biggest achievement, the secondary school that provides leaving certificate by widely spreading it –and democratizing the roads to university – this is where the disadvantages of groups falling behind can be seen the most clearly. This is the break line where the current Hungarian society split into two, the youth who can access to chances for learning and for decent life and youth who are deprived of the chances to learn and thus doomed to be permanently poor and to be outside the society. The shortcomings of the Hungarian public education and its backwardness in terms of methodology and approach mean particularly big burden on the children of unschooled, poor or Roma people. Due to being undereducated and poor these parents transfer a lot of disadvantages to their children at an early age. this is a significant problem, because the 20% of the population who remain uneducated in whole life and who has been refilling the basis of unemployment continuously for 15 years come from families who have learning problems, are Roma and usually poor. The Hungarian education system's serious crisis is also demonstrated by the international PISA reading tests. The problems regarding reading comprehension seem to be particularly serious in the cases of children whose parents are uneducated or come from poor or Roma family. For decades Hungarian public education has had the characteristics of accumulation of curriculum, having emphasis on quality thus the requirement of more and more lexical knowledge amplified the roles of family and society differences in the education. The pedagogical damages resulted from it, can be compensated in the middle-class families but in the poor ones. In relation to this there's backwardness in the pedagogical cultures of the teachers, as in the average Hungarian school the average Hungarian teacher does not know those new methods, which with they could help to catch up or help the talents to unfold. Lacking the necessary pedagogical culture, it often happens that the teachers do not recognize the professional problem that they face and often consider disciplinary issues when the problem could be solved with pedagogical methods. Instead of developing capabilities, the school system mostly has an exclusionary attitude when it comes to decide about children having learning problems.

The study represents and analyses the factors that hinder gypsy children to overcome the disadvantages in school and to catch up, the characteristics of the family's language socialization disadvantages, the conflict in terms of use of language within the family and in school, as a significant area of the school and learning failures.

THE HUNGARIAN GYPSY ETHNIC GROUPS AND THEIR DIALECTS

The Hungarian Gypsy population cannot be considered as a unified ethnic group. Born and shaped and still shaping by their own history, culture and relationship with the mainstream society. The current Hungarian Gypsy population is estimated between 700 000-800 000. According to their history, traditions and customs, they form three distinct forms. Carpathian ('Romungro' Hungarian)Gypsies, Vlach Gypsies, 'Beas' Gypsies. The name of Carpathian Roma comes from that the first wave of them had the Carpathian Basis as a starting place for migration. Carpathian Gypsies can be found in every country in Europe and their dialects are very similar to each other. The majority of them living in Hungary were force to abandon their language during the centuries, partly because of the violent attempts for assimilation. Nowadays they only speak Hungarian, this is why they are called Hungarian Gypsies (Romungro: Rom: human, Ungro: Hungarian). In Hungary they represent the largest proportion of the Roma population, 70%.

The Vlach Gypsies, the second largest group, arrived in Hungary in the 1850's gradually. Since they had lived in Romanian territory (Wallachia), they picked up many words from Romanian language; this is why their name is Vlach Gypsy. The hundreds of years of Gypsy persecution hit mostly the first wave of Carpathian Gypsies so they were less able to keep their culture than the Vlach Gypsies who came after them 400-500 years later. Partly because of this the



VlachGypsies known to be the group who best preserved their language, customs and traditions in Hungary. The Vlach Gypsies separated by their vocations and their typical names come from their occupation, for example, kelderás (tinker), csurári (sieve-maker), lovári (horse trader). Their proportion in Roma population is 20%, most of them still speak Romani, mainly on of its dialect, the Lovary which is also the language of Hungarian Gypsy literature. The Lovary communities live mainly in Budapest, in the region between Danube and Tisza and in the Transdanubian region. Most of them still deal with sale and purchase of non-ferrous metals and antiques.

By the arrival in Hungary (second half of the 20th century), the Beas Gypsies had not done booming for living, they did carapace carve and other household wood-carving utensils. This was partly replaced and partly completed by the craft of basket weaving. In Romania, they 'lost' their language originated from India so they speak archaic form of Romanian language which was used before the language reform. The language of Beas belongs to Latin family of languages, related to Italian and French so no wonder why the linguistics experts could not find a single word that has gypsy origin. Their proportion in Hungarian gypsy population is approximately 10%.

During the contemporary researches on gypsies the examination is not done the same extent on the three classic Gypsy group. Even nowadays it is hard to find a research on the culture of Hungarian Gypsies living in Hungary. The reason for this it that "the Hungarian Gypsies speaking the Hungarian language creates the notion that the language change was also a cultural change so these communities are only 'fallen behind'" (Kovalcsik 1998:12). Most researches are made on Valch Roma culture so it proves that the experts consider this group – because of their Indian language origin - to be the most different culture. Researches on Beas have not been interested much or been in the centre of attention, which is likely due to their small proportion of Gypsy population and to their language difficulties.

THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION ON SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF GYPSY CHILDREN

The socialization briefly

Socialization in the process during which an individual learnshis/her surrounding society's culture values, norms, rules of behaviour system of customs and traditions, that is, how to live and act in the given society (societal learning process). Important part of this process is learning what the whole society and the group where the individual belongs expect the individual to behave in different situation and what they consider to be right and vice versa, that is, what the individual can expect from the members of the group of the whole society. As a result of this process the individual learns to adapt to the requirements i.e. some kind of automatism develops in his behaviour. According to John A. Clausen, "...the socialization assumes that the individual becomes prone to adapt customs of society and the special group where he belongs to..." (Clausen, 1968:4). Acquisition of these values and norms etc. has two ways, as a result of imitation or as a result of purposed education. In case of imitation, socialization provides sample (influences) the individual in a way that his educational aims does not influence his behaviour. The socialized person tries to identify with the received (perceived)model and act similarly without any external force. In case of purposed education, the socializing person is motivated by some concrete, specific goals. In order to achieve the goals he can rewards or punish. The socialized person – in order to get reward or avoid punishment – tries to act according to the instructions. Of course punishment or reward can be followed by behaviour resulted from imitation and this can strengthen or weaken the effect of the imitation. Thus, the two kinds of learning forms can be combined during the process of socialization.

During infancy and childhood the only (or one of the most important) scene of socialization is the family. A significant part of family socialization happens via imitation i.e. the parents are the models for the children's behaviour. Additionally, in case of cognitive (knowing, mental-conceptual) contents, the family's role is significant. The process starts with learning speech then continues with the development of logical structure to arrange things in the world. These are, of course, social elements and expectations, but normally they are mediated by the family as well.

The socialized person usually identify with he imitates as well, it matters how much these mediated contents become the individual's i.e. how much they become interiorized. The mediated knowledge, values, norms, behavioural rules can be still accepted even if the individual does not feel them as its own, does not identify with them so only accept them externally. This means that the individual knows the rules and he is willing to comply them but only because he wants to avoid conflicts. A value or a norm can only be strong if that is interiorized, that is, they become a part of the individual's personality. Interiorization most likely happen to elements which are mediated by the family, because this is the time when main values are formed that (may) shape one's further life. Socialization does not happen within the family, as communities – of different kind and nature that surrounds the family – social institution (for example, school) group of peers and mass media are parts of this process as well. From our point of view – outside the family – the most important agent is school, the first scene where for children (gypsy and non-gypsy) selection happens.

In the community of Vlach Gypsies, children have special place and role which can be seen in the parenting habit. Children get initiated through family socialization into the dual culture system which surrounds them directly (gypsy culture) and indirectly (mainstream culture). Socialization problems of gypsy children turn up not because they are socialized badly within the family, but because they are socialized differently from what the mainstream society expects. It manifests in many things. The findings of the researches, which made with the engagement of wealthy, city dweller merchant gypsies (Vlach), show that their time management is different from the non-gypsies (Forray-Hegedűs 2000). The children do not have daily schedules so they eat or play when they feel like. Additionally, one of the characteristics of their rearing that the parents feel they can only do the best for the children if they instantly give anything the children want. In their parenting methods, some kinds of inconsistency prevail as they constantly change the requirements that their



children need to face. Considering their future, it has several negative consequences (Forray-Hegeđús 2000), for example, they have a little chance to develop their biological clock, which could be the basis of a regular life. Their rearing is not based on reward-punish system rather on imitating models, that is, instead of purposed education they socialized thorough techniques of imitation. Due to these, by the get into the Hungarian education system they already have disadvantages.

Most of the societal disadvantages of the Gypsies come from their huge falling behind in school, although school is the only possibility for them to have better chance to get job, higher salary and have better quality of life, achieve higher life expectancy, as well as, to have better health. In other words, successful school performance has great influence on one's future. Kertesi's research (1995) on it – following Gypsy children's 20 years of school career – produced important findings. According to the results, the inequality mostly arises at a point, exactly after 8th grade, in secondary education. It, however, hinders getting into higher education. Consequently, the critical point of inequality in getting appropriate education attainment is secondary education. It means a big problem that there is considerable big number of those who are functional illiterate people after finishing elementary school and this can reduce young gypsies' chances to get further education or retraining. Moreover, most vocational school provides vocations that have been less demanded for years.

Performance indicators of schools, where higher proportion of gypsies attend, are worse than the other schools'; it is reflected by the high rate of failure and significant number of over-aged students. According to the professionals who made the research, school failures and early drop outs are primarily due to "socio-cultural" reasons. Although, the education is tuition-free, the kindergarten, textbooks, tools, caterings, transportation etc. are not free. Gypsy families below the poverty line are not able to pay these costs; moreover, they often need their children earning activity for the financial survival. Disadvantaged social and health situation of gypsy children often delay their enrolment, consequently, their primary education extends into their age-stage when the gypsy children follow adult behaviour pattern.

Despite, the majority of Gypsy families recognize the importance of schooling, they can hardly do anything for their children to have successful school career. On the one hand, this is because of the parents' unsuccessful school failures and on the other hand, because the conflict situation that the school belongs to the mainstream society and not to the Gypsies. It manifests partly in that the schools set expectation of the children which are different from their culture and tradition and partly in the prejudices of non-gypsy children or very often of the teachers. According to the authors, the therapy for Gypsy children to earn maturity for school attendance can only be successful if the kindergarten and school become capable of handle otherness resulted from belonging to poverty subculture and to minority.

Some sociological theories seem to refute the viability of these ideas Péter Somlai (1997) analyzed that how the modern school system – through linguistic communication – contributes to the maintenance and regeneration of social inequalities. He found that the large-scale public education programs which was initiated in the developed western countries in order to eliminate inequalities regarding school and learning, has been proved to be failure overall. From our point of view, the most important example – that Péter Somlai mentions – is that even those pre-school programs were failures in which children participated from the year of 1 until the beginning primary school. It was also observed that the effect of these programs faded 1-2 years after beginning school. As Somlai summarized, it was proven: *"pedagogy in school is usually unable to eliminate disadvantages outside of school and with its tool to create equal educational chances for the children."* (Somlai 1997: 38)

It is supported by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and cultural reproduction and by Basil Bernstein's theory about re-interpretation of transmitting family and school disadvantages. According to Bourdieu, the school imply the position of children in the society by seemingly objective requirements make the students admit that they are only suitable for what they are predestined based on their school performance. Bourdieu says, in fact in school, while correcting tests and giving grades the teachers evaluate those elements of erudition which are brought from home by the most privileged families and which cannot be acquired in school by the disadvantaged students. (Cited by Andorka, 1997:135) It means that schools – on the basis of their faith in fair rating of performance – constitute an implied social discrimination and contribute to the transmission of certain societal position from generation to generation.

However, Bernstein assumes that, in terms of school performance, the most important factor is not the amount of knowledge acquired at home but the way of language contact at home. (Cited by Somlai, 1997:38). In other words, he puts the main emphasis on language skills as the reason of regeneration of inequalities by the school. Considering families' language used at home communication code system, we can determine two language contact systems: linguistic system of those who communicate using elaborated codes and who use limited codes. In the elaborated codes (upper classes), the language and speech are the primary while in the limited codes (lowest class) non-verbal means of communication are the primary. Thus the differences between them related to the speech (performance) and primarily emerge in the signal system during speech.

The question arises, is the problem formulation good, that is, does the starting point need to be the reason why gypsy children has unsuccessful school performance is only the family background, insufficient socialization, the low education attainment of the parents etc?

For this question, a new research trend can provide an answer, which trend has been unfolding in the last 20 years and about the analysis of language socialization processes from the perspective of anthropology. According to the trend, the children in the native language community learn not only the grammar but modes of language use which is culturally and socially determined and valid in the community. This process – the so-called language socialization – is a part of the socialization process, by which the young child become a culturally and socially competent person and full member of a given society. Examinations of chances for language socialization and for school of children, who come from different



social classes or ethnic communities, showed that modes of language use can be the source of advantages or disadvantages in school. From this perspective, many signs suggest that the gypsy children's language disadvantages resulted from that the relationship between the acquired language models available at home and written language is usually missing.

70% of Hungarian Gypsies has Hungarian as mother tongue, the rest speak some kind of gypsy dialect (Vlach Gypsy ca.20%) or the dialect of Romanian (Beas Gypsy ca. 10%). Although number of gypsies who do not speak Hungarian is smaller than those who do (and this number has been decreasing even today due to switch of the language), they are the biggest language minority in the country. According to Radó (1997) this has been ignored by the public education. Even today the main aim of having gypsy students catch up is to make them "be able to be taught". Katalin R. Forray and András T Hegedűs found two types of socialization strategies within their research among VlachGypsies, one of them was that certain families raise their children in gypsy speaking environment claiming that they will learn Hungarian in school anyways. The other strategy was that certain families use Hungarian to communicate with their children claiming they will learn gypsy in the family and business anyways. In both case, the fact is disturbing that in neither of the language environment in which the child grow up, the "language of school is spoken". Researches argued that *"For the schooling problems of gypsy children, the inflexibility of mainstream school system is responsible, not the Roma communities. According to most widespread perception in pedagogy, the reasons of the failures should be sought in the Roma children's adaption problems. In most cases, the opposite does not even arise: the school should adapt to the Roma children."* (Nahalka nd:2) According to the consequences, the author made regarding the educational effectiveness, the school success of those who are from disadvantaged societal group is below the average level, their education is shorter, their acquired education attainment is lower level (generally); as a result, after finishing their education, the available social position, status, interest enforcement are way worse. Referring to Bourdieu, he argues: *"school is a conservative institution of the regeneration in terms of social inequalities, based on unchanged patterns, in which the disadvantaged status is transmitted from generation to generation."* (Nahalka nd:3)

The school language problem of gypsy children is complex since most of the teachers state that not only the children of the parents who are bilingual (Gypsy-Hungarian) or of those who speak some kind of gypsy dialect but the native Hungarian speaker gypsies' children have language difficulties too. The gypsy children's language disadvantage stems from that the connection with the written language is missing from the language model, that is available and acquired at home. (Réger 1995) In case of gypsy children, the pre-school socialization regarding reading and writing is missing especially. Since, the children from traditional gypsy families acquire hardly anything because there are not appropriate tools in the surrounding material environment for it, for example, books (examinations made by Forray-Hegedűs confirmed that books influence school success and children's motivations to learn more than the education attainment of the father and the mother). In the traditional gypsy communities, the children's books are missing from the material environment (as well as the toys); Those typical situations, activities related to the use of written records are missing from the everyday life and from the activates with the parents. This means the gypsy children living in their native environment, where parents are illiterate or functionally illiterate, are in scarcity of those material and language skills, conceptual set, behavioural and interactive models, that the children living in surrounding culture learn from the books or activities related to books, mediated by the adults. Experience show that, the school does not know or ignore cultural-language knowledge of those children who were raised in a family where traditional oral culture of Gypsies is preserved. The difference between the language use of modes expected at home and in the school is a serious source of difficulties and failures in school. This factor, as itself, guarantees the school efficiency. Lack of experience related to written records, practically characterize the gypsy pre-school education universally of children coming from groups that are different in terms of language and lifestyle. At present, the main factor of pedagogical culture that affect the gypsy children's school performance negatively is passing the responsibility, that is, the teachers' complaint about the gypsy children do not have those capability, knowledge and behavioural, attitudinal preconditions that are required in order to deal with them at all. The majority of the teachers expect the following of a children who start school: to be capable of having appropriate intensity and duration of concentration, to meet the instruction, to have appropriate attitude regarding learning, to be motivated and be able to activated, to have respectful behaviour, to keep certain rules of behaviour, to follow norms in certain areas, to have skills and abilities which the non-gypsy children can acquire in kindergarten, to have knowledge that every children should learn by the age of 6, according to the teachers (e.g. simple concepts), to know Hungarian language as much as it needs to be able to receive information in school. As for the unique socialization (the effect of maternal love and care that is stronger than the average, freedom of children's activity in the gypsy communities, engagement in family life, equality with the adults) of Roma children, it produces such results which is almost naturally against the rigid school value system and its direct consequence is the failure of meeting the norms. Of course gypsy children also have to be able concentrate longer and longer, need to be aware of the importance of learning, learn the customs which govern people's contact in another culture, need to learn certain knowledge and same capabilities and skills of theirs should develop. But to make their socialization process successful, the school needs to ensure certain requirements. Firstly, the school should acknowledge that most of the gypsy children go this socialization phase through when they start school, so the school should not assume that they can build on these from the beginning; secondly, the socialization process may take place in the existing cultural base since gypsy children cannot be successful if they exclude their own culture; thirdly, the starting pint should be: *"this is not a culture that be placed into two hierarchy, i.e. the Roma culture could not be subordinated to the mainstream society, because there are two equal norm and value system, which are developed in order to specifically solve certain problems of social groups so they cannot be compared but placed next to each other."* (Nalhalka nd.12) MiklósKontra, the linguistic, has similar view; according to him, the right to education is fundamental human right, so no one can be limited to their rights based on linguistic, because *"who puts languages into hierarchy, that put people in hierarchy"*. (Kontra 2005: 8).



CONCLUSION

It is a social-psychological fact that if a certain minority life form is permanent within the society, its consequences will be permanent too. It stems from that a discriminated person rebels or compensates. In case of Hungarian Gypsies the classic symptoms (frustration, repression, projection, feeling inferior, self-hatred) appear uniquely in this process. This minority does not rebel against the discrimination that they need to face for centuries. Their tool system of survival (traditions, culture, language, avoiding confrontation etc) made them immune against the mainstream society's power and other systems. Rights acquired during socialism –full employment, inclusive social welfare system – provided them relative protection and subsistence resulting in them to leave their previously mentioned habits, elements of culture quickly which used to mean their survival. However, the thing has changes after the political transformation. Due to the massive loss of jobs and the exclusive nature of the welfare system, the Roma people immediately fell back to the conditions of fifty years earlier, they had to face the status of being outside the society without their customs, traditions, psychological 'tricks', the exclusion of gypsies appears in many scenes and one of the most important of these is the education. The main reasons of gypsies' school failure are the little motivation to learn, different socialization, bad social status, language disadvantages, prejudices against gypsies, segregation in school, inaptitude of the applied programs and the inaptitude of the applied pedagogical methods (Harsányi-Radó 1997).

The unanimous opinion of the experts is the main strategy on the field of education could be that they block the exclusion in the earliest possible period of the childhood, that is, if we put the emphasis on the education of the children of kindergarten age. Considering that the majority of gypsies was excluded from the labour market and a narrow stratum rapidly moving away from the mainstream society's cultural-civilization value system, today they remain in kindergarten and school is almost the only change for them to be able to survive the current crisis (by the acquired model and knowledge of behaviour, value and culture) in a way they do not fall behind the mainstream society permanently.

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