Learnability Theory and Rural Roma Children’s Knowledge of Languages: An Empirical Psycholinguistic Comparative Study

Hristo Kyuchukov
D. Sc. in Pedagogy, Professor

E-mail: hkyuchukov@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1965-8908
ResearcherID: E-5677-2015

1 University of Silesia (Poland)
Ш 12, Bankowa Str., Katowice, Poland, 40-007

2 National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty (Kazakhstan)
Ш вул. Шевченко, 28, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 050010

Original manuscript received July 06, 2023
Revised manuscript accepted September 17, 2023

ABSTRACT

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to examine Learnability Theory (Valiant, 1984) in the process of learning of L2 Bulgarian and Czech languages by preschool Roma children. Roma children grow up in a rich oral culture and learn their mother tongue from the members of extended families, but how they learn the L2 and which factors facilitate the process second language acquisition (SLA) is not clear.
Learnability Theory and Rural Roma Children’s Knowledge...

**Methods.** 20 bilingual Roma children from Bulgaria and 20 bilingual Roma children from the Czech Republic (in two age groups 4–5 and 5–6-years-old) were tested with linguistic tests on their knowledge, centering on their ability to learn new grammatical categories. The children were tested with a specially developed test, bearing in mind the peculiarities of Romani grammatical categories. The same grammatical categories were tested in the official languages of the countries where the children live – in the Bulgarian and Czech languages.

**Results.** The findings show that the children from Bulgaria are much better in learning Bulgarian than the Roma children from Czech Republic learning Czech. There is a connection between the knowledge of the Roma children of their mother tongue and the official language. The data shows that the Bulgarian Roma children know their mother tongue much better and this helps them to better learn Bulgarian, while the Czech Roma children have a comparatively poor knowledge of Romani and they acquire the Czech ethnolect – the variety of Czech spoken by Roma, which differs from official standard Czech.

**Conclusions.** The study showed that learning grammatical categories form a new language in early age dependence form the language knowledge and experiences of the child in their mother tongue. The new knowledge in a new language is acquired based on the old knowledge in the mother tongue. This is shown also in other studies, for example with Turkish bilingual children, that the knowledge in mother tongue helps learning a new language.

**Key words:** Learnability Theory, Roma children, second language acquisition (SLA), mother tongue (MT), ethnolect.

**Introduction**

The language and cultural similarities between Roma and Indian ethnic minorities are known. There are also a lot of similarities in what children from Indian communities and Roma children learn. Singh (1995) describes how the children from the ethnic group Ho in India obtain knowledge about the world in their community. The children acquire the most important knowledge and information through oral communication. There is a strict differentiation in the given knowledge gained by the children depending on their gender. Oral traditions play an important role as source of knowledge. When the children are expected to help the adults with work in the community, this is not said directly to them, but the adults will tell a story which leads the children to understand its meaning and then help the adults. The language is learned in an active living context. The Roma children who also grow up in a rich oral history ecology, learn Romani through oral communication.
with adults in their communities. Taking care of the Roma child usually is a responsibility of the whole community. Everyone in the community talks or plays with the children. In extended families, all relatives can tell a story or sing a song with the child and this is the way the child is exposed to the grammatical structures of their mother tongue. For example, Reger (1999), writing on Hungarian Roma children, presents “teasing” as a strategy used by Roma adults in order to teach the children aspects of grammar. In various studies Kyuchukov (2005, 2006) shows that the father in the Roma family occupies an important role because he uses the “whole grammar” approach when speaking to the children. The fathers do not employ the maternal way of talking to and with children; rather they speak with the children as if they are adults. In generally from a very early age, the way of communicating with Roma children in the communities is more analogous to that among adults. From a very early age, the Roma children are equipped with different communicative styles and this helps the child to acquire the basic core grammatical structures very early on in their development. But how do the Roma children learn the official languages in their context?

In Bulgaria over the past three decades, there have been a series of studies published based on research findings on Bulgarian as a second language. Terzieva (2009), Stefanova (1999, 2001a, b, 2009), and Kyuchukov (2004, 2008) have shown in a number of publications different strategies for better acquisition of Bulgarian as a second language (SL), the kinds of errors the children make when learning the language, what Bulgarian grammatical categories are difficult for Roma children to acquire and why.

In the Czech Republic to date there has been just one study about the Czech language spoken by Roma (Borkovcova, 2006). The findings indicate that the Czech language used by Roma in their everyday communication is different from the Czech language spoken by ethnic Czechs. The Roma children actually grow up with the Slovak variety of Romani and learn an ethnolect of Czech.

Learnability Theory and Language Acquisition by Roma children

Learnability Theory

Learnability Theory is based on the process of “learnability”, which refers to a set of mathematical models of how language can be
Learnability Theory and Rural Roma Children’s Knowledge acquired. According to Valiant (1984: 1134): “Humans appear to be able to learn new concepts without needing to be programmed explicitly in any conventional sense… [The] learning … [is] the phenomenon of the knowledge acquisition in the absence of explicit programming”

Bertolo (2001: 2–3) explains the learnability process more precisely. He writes:

“…since humans understand and produce utterances productively – i.e. they are able to understand and produce utterances they were never exposed to – having learned a human language cannot be equated with having memorized the list of all the sentences that one has ever encountered, but it must amount instead to having internalized a system of rules (a grammar). Under this view, the final state of the learning process encodes grammatical knowledge that can be used to classify every possible sentence as grammatical or ungrammatical in the target language. This observation might give the impression that learnability may only address the problem of learning of surface syntax of a language. This is in fact not the case. One can easily annotate an utterance with all the syntactic and semantic information”.

In other words, Learnability Theory is about the way the human being learns new grammatical forms which the individual never heard before, or the ability of a human being to implement the knowledge of known grammatical rules transferred onto new categories which s/he had never heard before. How do the children growing up learn new words? How do they apply the grammatical rules to the new words? These are the main questions we seek an answer to.

Some American researchers have more recently sought to better understand how children from different cultures learn new grammatical rules in their languages. For this purpose, Hirsh-Pasek, Kohanoff, Newcombe and de Villiers (2005) developed a test for language assessment of preschool children.

In the case of Roma children who learn their mother tongue and acquire all the symbols of the Roma community in a traditional manner, when they enter kindergarten – where there is an organised education through the medium of the official language of the country they live in – they encounter a situation of conflict. As a rule, the contemporary kindergarten does not value the knowledge of the children from home. There are no mechanisms by which this knowledge can be transferred
and used in kindergartens. The children find themselves in a conflict situation where what has been learned at home and what is to be learned in kindergarten differ significantly. The knowledge of the Roma child in his mother tongue is not taken into account and it is not used in the educational process.

**Acquisition of Romani at Home**

The Roma are largest multilingual minorities in Europe (de Latour, 2023). Among the Roma groups there is an ethnocultural diversity. The author, speaking generally about the cultural rights of Roma in Europe, also underlines the language rights of this particular group. Genoz, Cots and Gonzalez-Davies (2023) present the situation of another minority group in Europe (the Basque) and they defend their rights to be plurilingual. In the case of the Basque minority group, it is deemed normal to have plurilingualism and to support it, but in the case of Roma, it is considered of importance to learn the official language of the country. There is no idea of strong support for the L1 mother tongue/home language of the child.

The Roma parents in general have positive attitudes towards the education of their children (Zachos & Panatiotidou, 2019). However very often the public school does not involve the parents in the educational process and the voices of the parents about the education of their children and how it should be organized is not taken into account. The majority educators think that the children enter the kindergarten/primary school like a “tabula rasa”, i.e. with no knowledge about anything. The child’s life experiences and acquired knowledge in the Romani language, the cultural heritage which the 3–4–5-years-old child possesses, is not viewed as a “treasure” but exactly the opposite. The teachers think that they will give the children their first knowledge about everything in life.

In a study with Greek Roma mothers, Strataki and Petrogiannis (2020) found out that the mothers have prepared their children at home for *Gadzho* (non-Roma) education, according to their cultural values. Among those values is also the knowledge of the mother tongue. However, they also have aspirations in regard to the educational system. The Roma parents are not indifferent to the educational process of their children. They would like to see their children successful and accepted at school (Khalfaoui, Garcia-Carrion & Villardon-Gallego, 2020).
In order to help the children in early ages to develop their bilingualism, de Villiers (2017) suggests that children, speakers of small and “stigmatized” languages (such as Romani) need to get tested in their mother tongue with a specially developed test, taking into consideration the language and cultural peculiarities of Roma. That will also aid the school psychologist in avoiding any misunderstanding and errors by placing Roma children in “special schools” for children with presumed mental deficits (Nowak and Kaleja, 2020).

**Bilingualism of Roma Children**

Roma children grow up in a bilingual environment. Since early childhood they are exposed to two languages, and in some cases even they grow up with three languages. Very often together with their home language, the Roma children learn the language of another neighboring minority group as well as the official language of the country, or even an international language which they learn from YouTube and social media.

Runnqvist et al. (2011) examined both the behavioral and neuroscientific evidence in order to critically assess three hypotheses that have been put forward in the literature to explain such differences: the weaker links, executive control, and post-lexical accounts. The authors conclude that (a) while all stages of processing are likely to be slowed down when speaking in an L2 compared to an L1, the differences seem to originate at a lexical stage; and (b) frequency of use seems to be the variable mainly responsible for these bilingual processing disadvantages.

The bilingualism of Roma children is not different from the bilingualism of any other children. Of course, there are cultural differences, however learning the L1 and L2 the children go through the same psychological and psycholinguistic processes. Sierens et al. (2019) report about the L2 of acquisition of Turkish children in Flemish preschools in Belgium. The authors conclude that Turkish L1 vocabulary size significantly predicts the Dutch L2 vocabulary.

According to Konishi et al. (2014), children learning English as a second language often face struggles, as they may experience poverty and impoverished language input at home. The authors claim that early exposure to a rich language environment is crucial for ESL children’s academic success. They develop six evidenced-based principles of language learning and can be used to provide support for ESL children. These principles are: (1). Children learn what they
hear most. (2). Children learn words for things and events that interest them. (3). Interactive and responsive rather than passive contexts promote language learning. (4). Children learn words best in meaningful contexts. (5). Children need to hear diverse examples of words and language structures. (6). Vocabulary and grammatical development are reciprocal processes.

Brizic (2006) raises another important question. The author connects the performance of the language tests with the social inequalities and stigmatisation not only in the country of immigration but just as much, if not primarily, also in the country of origin. The author who studies Turkish and ex-Yugoslavian children in Austria finds that this fact has implications for the handling of what is generally perceived as the “weak performance of Turkish children” in Austrian and other European schools. It is difficult to deal with former stigmatisation (in the country of origin) by more of the same (in the country of immigration) – e.g. through separate L2 training for the children (which they often experience as social exclusion) or obligatory language courses for their parents. Rather, a fortification of the children’s linguistic self-confidence in the L2 and their languages in everyday school matters can be regarded as highly promising factors for successful L2 acquisition.

It is clear that the children processing a SL go through the same levels of difficulties and often those difficulties are strengthened by the educational systems, ignoring the bilingualism of the minority/migrant children and rejecting the existence of a mother tongue different form the official language of the country.

**Methodology**

**Concept of the Study and Research Question**

The Roma children in most East European countries come to kindergarten with a limited knowledge of their second language (L2) – the official language of the country and in the conditions of the kindergarten, which is the first educational institution for most children, they have to acquire it. Coming to kindergarten by the age of 3–4, most children are monolingual – they speak only their mother tongue and the second language they start to learn in kindergarten. The Roma children
face a lot of difficulties learning the L2, because their knowledge of their mother tongue – L1 – is not taken into account. The present study is trying to find out what are key factors that which facilitate the process of learning a L2 in the conditions of kindergarten.

My working hypothesis here is that if the children have a good knowledge of the grammar of their mother tongue, they will easily learn their second language as well. The level of knowledge of the mother tongue (MT) influences the acquisition of the grammatical categories in the second language (SL).

**Novelty of the Research**

This research is new because it brings a new approach to the process of language learning. In this process the role of mother tongue is taken as an important part of the learning process and the testing of the knowledge of the children with a test specially developed according to the peculiarities of Romani is something new, not done before. Usually in most of the studies translated testing materials are used or adapted when the knowledge of Roma children is measured. Here the developed test takes into consideration the grammatical aspects of Romani. For testing the L2 of the children the test is adapted into the second language of the children.

**Materials**

The tests used were developed in the Laboratory of Psycholinguistics at the Psychology Department at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA by the author of the article and Jill de Villiers in 2013, and the test is not standardized. It was developed with the goal to test the children's knowledge in their mother tongue. However, part of the test was translated into Bulgarian and Czech, because some grammatical categories exist in these two languages as well. It was done especially for the purpose of this particular study. A total of nine sub-tests were developed, containing some 90 items: wh-questions, wh-complements, passive verbs, repetition of sentences, possessiveness, tens, aspect of the verb, fast noun mapping and fast adjective mapping. For the purpose of the study only 3 sub-tests were used.

The children were shown some pictures, and they had to answer the questions according to the content of the pictures. The questions were in connection with the following grammatical categories:
Test 1 – *wh-questions* – contents 8 items. The items content 2 or 3 *wh*-words at the beginning of interrogative sentences: *Who eats what?* In Bulgarian this is *Кой какво яде?* and in Czech: *Kdo co jí?* The children were shown pictures and the expectation from them was that they will be exhaustive in their answers.

![Image](image1.png)

Test 2 – *wh-complements* – contents 8 items. The English items are: *The mother told the child to bring a large bowl, but he brought her a big glass. What did the mother tell the child to bring?* In Bulgarian the sentence is: *Майката каза на детето да донесе голяма тенджера, но то донесе голяма чаша. Какво каза майката на детето да донесе?* In Czech the sentence is: *Matka řekla dítěti, aby přinesl velkou mísu, ale ono ji přineslo velkou sklenici. Co řekla matka dítěti, aby přineslo?*

![Image](image2.png)

Test 3 – *passive verbs*-contents 16 items. In this test the children are shown 3 pictures and they have a multiple-choice question: just one picture relates to the sentence. The sentences in English are: *The horse was kicked by the dog;* in Bulgarian: *Конят беше ритнат от кучето;* and in Czech: *Kůň byl nakopnut psem.*
Research Method

The research method used in the study is the psycholinguistic experiment. All the children were tested in a separate room where the researcher and a teacher from the kindergarten were present. The children were shown the pictures, and their answers were written in special protocols, after that coded and entered into an Excel spreadsheet for statistical analysis.

Participants in the Study

Two groups of Roma children, 20 children from Bulgaria and 20 from the Czech Republic, were tested employing the same tests in the official languages of their countries, Bulgarian and Czech and in Romani, varieties spoken in Bulgaria and in Czech Republic. The age groups of the children were: 1 gr. 4–5-years-old, 2 gr. 5–6-years-old. The Bulgarian Roma children are from the village of Rosen in the Burgas region. The Czech Roma children are from the villages around Olomouc.

The children were tested with three tests in their official languages and in Romani: wh-questions, complements and passive verbs. The results were analysed using the statistical program ANOVA.
**Research Findings**

*In the Official Languages*

The children exhibit a good performance in all their tests. The older children perform much better than the younger children and the differences between the groups are statistically significant.

Test 1 – wh-questions was performed much better by 5–6-year-olds and these results are shown in Figure 1. The differences are statistically significant: \( F(1.33) = 19.378; \ p<0.001 \).

Figure 2 shows that the results of Roma children from Bulgaria are much better than the results of the children from the Czech Republic performing the wh-questions test. The differences are statistically significant: \( F(1.33) = 56.103; \ p<0.001 \).

Performance of the wh-questions tests by residence. The two-way interaction between the factors shows that Roma 5–6-year-olds from Bulgaria are much better in Bulgarian than the same age group of children from the Czech Republic in Czech. The differences between the groups are statistically significant: \( F(1.33) = 14.862; \ (p<0.001) \). This is shown in Figure 3.

What could be the reason for such a difference? Both languages (Bulgarian and Czech) have the wh-words at the beginning of sentences and both Roma dialects have the same phenomenon. This is known by the children. Then why did the Bulgarian group have a better performance in comparison with the Czech group? Let us see how the children perform the Test 2 – complements. The results are given in Figure 4.

As can be seen from Figure 4, again 5–6-year-olds in both countries are much better in performing the complements. The statistical differences between them are significant: \( F(1.34) = 14.557; \ (p<0.001) \). However, the Bulgarian Roma children performed significantly better in this test. This result is shown in Figure 5.

Fig. 5 shows that the differences between Bulgarian and Czech children are statistically significant: \( F(1.34) = 17.211; \ (p<0.001) \). The interaction between the two factors Age and Residence is also statistically significant. This is shown in Fig. 6. Although the Bulgarian and Czech 5–6-year-olds perform the test of complements in the same way, the differences are statistically significant: \( F(1.34) = 15.793; \ (p<0.001) \).
Learnability Theory and Rural Roma Children’s Knowledge...

**Figure 1**

*Performance of wh-questions Test by Age Groups*

![Graph showing the performance of wh-questions test by age groups.](image)

- **Age; LS Means**
  - Current effect: $F(1, 33)=19.378, p=.00011$
  - Effective hypothesis decomposition
  - Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals

- **4-5 years old**
- **5-6 years old**

**Figure 2**

*Performance of the wh-questions Tests by Residence*

![Graph showing the performance of wh-questions test by residence.](image)

- **Residence; LS Means**
  - Current effect: $F(1, 33)=66.103, p=.00000$
  - Effective hypothesis decomposition
  - Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals

- **Bulgaria**
- **Czech Republic**

© Kyuchukov, H. 119
Figure 3
Two-way Interaction Between the Factors Age and Residence in the Performance of the wh-questions Test

Figure 4
Performance of wh-complements Test by Age Groups
Learnability Theory and Rural Roma Children's Knowledge...  

**Figure 5**  
*Performance of wh-complements Test by Residence*  

Residence; LS Means  
Current effect: F(1, 34)=17.211, p=.00021  
Effective hypothesis decomposition  
Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals  

**Figure 6**  
*Two-way Interaction Between the Factors Age and Residence in the Performance of the Complements Test*  

Age*Residence; LS Means  
Current effect: F(1, 34)=15.793, p=.00035  
Effective hypothesis decomposition  
Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals
The last test – Test 3 – passives is also performed in the same way as the previous two tests. The 5–6-year-old Roma children know the passive verbs better than 4–5-year-olds. The differences between the age groups are statistically significant: F(1.35) = 9.6663; (p<0.01). This result is shown in the Figure 7.

Let us see how the children know the passive verbs by the factor of Residence. The Bulgarian Roma children know them much better than the Czech Roma children. The differences between the two groups are statistically significant: F (1.35) = 41.524; (p<0.001). This is shown in Figure 8.

The interaction between the factors Age and Residence in the performance of passive verbs test is not statistically significant.

There is still one question unanswered: why are the Bulgarian Roma children better than Czech Roma children in their official language? Let us take a look of the results of the same tests but in their mother tongues – the Bulgarian variety and Czech variety of Romani.

Figure 7
Performance of Passive Verbs test by Age Groups
In Romani as a Mother Tongue

Bulgarian Roma Children

There are no statistically significant differences between the two age groups children performing Test 1 – wh-questions. Both group children know equally well the wh-questions.

However, in the performance of the Test 2 – wh-complements in Romani – there is just a statistical difference between the age groups (p<0.01) The results are shown in Figure 9. As can be seen from Fig. 9, the 5–6-year-olds perform the complements test better than the children 4–5 years old: F(1.13) = 7.0312; (p<0.01).

In the performance of the Test 3 – passives – only the factor “gender” has a statistically significant influence on passive verbs: F(1.14) = 5.0126; (p<0.05). The results are shown in Figure 10.

From the figures it is clear that the boys perform this test better than the girls. Is not clear why there are such differences, because all the children live under the same conditions.
Figure 9
Performance of the wh-complements Test in Romani by Roma Children from Bulgaria

![Graph showing performance of the wh-complements Test in Romani by Roma children from Bulgaria. The graph displays the complement test total scores by age (4-5 years old and 5-6 years old). The current effect is F(1, 13) = 7.0312, p = .01995. Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals.]

Figure 10
Performance of the Passive Verbs Test in Romani by Roma children from Bulgaria

![Graph showing performance of the Passive Verbs Test in Romani by Roma children from Bulgaria. The graph displays the passive verbs test total scores by gender (feminine and masculine). The current effect is F(1, 14) = 5.0126, p = .04192. Vertical bars denote 0.95 confidence intervals.]

Czech Roma Children

Performing the wh-questions test in Romani, the results of the children show that there are no statistically significant differences between groups. No factor has a statistically significant influence on the performance of the Test 2 – wh-complements either. The reasons for this result could be the low number of children who performed this test.

On Test 3 – passive verbs test – only the factor of “age” has a statistically significant influence: \( F(1.11) = 8.8902; (p<0.01) \); 5–6-year-olds are better than the 4–5-year-olds. The results are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11
Performance of the Passive Verbs test by Roma Children from the Czech Republic

If we compare the results of Roma children from Bulgaria and from the Czech Republic in Romani as their mother tongue, we obtain the following pictures.

In the performance of the wh-questions test, the results of Roma children from Bulgaria are better than the results of Roma children from the Czech Republic and the differences between the two groups performances are statistically significant: \( F(1.27) = 26.835; (p<0.001) \). This is shown in Fig. 12.
There are no statistically significant differences in the performance of the 2 test – wh-complements.

However, in the performance of test 3 – passive verbs – again the Roma children from Bulgaria performed the test better than the Roma children from the Czech Republic. It seems that Bulgarian Roma children have a better knowledge of their mother tongue. The results are shown in Fig. 13.

As can be seen from Fig. 12 the differences between the Bulgarian and Czech Roma children are statically significant: F (1.25) = 23.717; (p< 0.001). And Fig. 14 shows that the 5–6-year-olds are better than the 4–5-year-olds. Again, the differences are statistically significant: F(1.25) = 8.6993; (p<0.001).

Comparing the residence and the age of the children as factors, we can see that there is interaction between them. This is shown in Fig. 15.

As can be seen from Fig. 15, the 5-6 year-olds from both countries perform this test equally well, but there are statistically significant differences in the performance of 4–5-year-olds: F(1.25) = 9.1916; (p<0.001).
Figure 13
Comparison of Performance of the Passive Verbs Test Between Roma Children from Bulgaria and the Czech Republic in Romani

Figure 14
Comparison of Performance of the Passive Verbs Test Between 4–5 and 5–6-year-olds Among Roma Children from Bulgaria and the Czech Republic in Romani
Discussion

All the analyses show that the Roma children from Bulgaria know Bulgarian much better as their SL than Roma children from the Czech Republic know Czech as a SL. These results have some explanation stemming from the level of knowledge of their MT (L1). Roma children from this particular region of Bulgaria know Romani better than Roma children from the Czech Republic.

The Bulgarian Roma children still have access to a rich Romani language as L1. In small villages and in Roma settlements in large towns and cities, where the Roma live isolated, Romani is still spoken, and they succeed in preserving their dialects. Different Roma dialects are actively used in daily life among Roma communities. During the communist era in Bulgaria (1944–1990), the segregation of Roma in so-called “Romani mahala” (Roma settlement areas) helped them to preserve their language and culture. In the Czech Republic, the Roma communities were more “integrated” into Czech society and subject
to the assimilatory policy of the Czech government over the past 60 years towards Roma. Thus, they came to the stage where they had lost segments of their native Romani and created their own Czech idiolect or variety, an ethnolect differing from official Czech. The young generation learns from parents the Czech Roma ethnolect and they have difficulties learning the standard Czech language because the structures of their distinctive ethnolectic variety of Czech – which serves as a main tool for communication – is already established in the children’s brain. So, it seems that Roma children from the Czech Republic lack a solid knowledge of Romani grammar and of correct standard Czech grammar. And the parents play an important role in this process because the children learn the Czech ethnolect from them.

What is the solution of the problem? In an article about Roma education, Kyuchukov (2019) proposed the Montessori methodology as the correct appropriate methodology, with a strong focus on Romani as mother tongue education, i.e. requiring changes in the educational system of Roma children: a more interactive approach using the local rich Roma oral history. What does this have to do with Learnability Theory? For Roma children from this part of Bulgaria, where Romani is dominant L1, it is relatively easy to apply the knowledge of their MT to their SL, because they have the solid basis for it. When the children know well Romani wh-questions, complements and passive verbs, they do not have problems to transfer this knowledge from their mother tongue to their second language. The Roma children from the Czech Republic have not acquired these grammatical categories, neither in Romani nor in standard Czech. They acquired a hybrid blend, something partly from both languages, and the process of transfer of the old knowledge to new words or new grammatical categories from the SL is in this case impossible.

Conclusions

Coming back to Learnability Theory I can say the following. In most East European countries, the educational process for language learning in kindergarten is done utilising the same methodology as described by Comenius in his Didactica Magna some 400 years ago. For the last four centuries, the basic methods of language learning/teaching
in kindergarten mostly have not changed. However, children are not the same as the children 400 years ago and technology over past centuries has seen significant advances. The question then is: why are educators not making good use of the developments in science and technology to improve the language educational process in minority/Roma children in the kindergartens?

As Berg (2017) suggests there is a need for educators to “cross the boundaries of their respective fields to develop innovative solutions to the socio-ecological problems confronting humanity. A greater diversity of ideologies are available through various languages, and the creativity that comes from multilingualism. An active and contributing participant can be fostered in a culture that improves the ecological system of the learners” (p. 44).

Rogoff (1991) expresses it in a different way referring to Vygotskian theory, namely that “children are part of a larger sociocultural theory that places human skills and achievements in the context of technologies, practices and values available through cultural history” (p. 68). Roma cultural history plays an important role in the language development of Roma children around the world, and they are introduced to the language through the culture under the guidance of more experienced members of Roma communities. The Romani language, being an important part of Roma culture, plays a major role in the process of second language acquisition and if the educators ignore this fact, they doom Roma children to failure in acquiring a second language. Learning grammatical categories from a new language in early age depends on and is shaped by the language knowledge and experiences of the child in their mother tongue. The new knowledge in a new language is acquired based on the old knowledge in the mother tongue. This is shown also in other studies, for example with Turkish bilingual children, that the knowledge in mother tongue helps learning a new language (Sierens et al., 2019). L1 plays an important role in the development of L2. My study with Roma children, although limited in the number of the subjects from both countries, proved the same.
ADHERENCE TO ETHICAL STANDARDS

Ethics Declarations. The research proposal of the present study was presented and approved by the Committee for Ethics of Research at the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland. The research design, the testing materials and the letters to parents to get a written permission from them to include their children in the study were discussed and approved by the Committee before starting the research.

Data Availability. The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the manuscript. Raw datasets generated during the current study are available from the author, Dr. Hristo Kyuchukov, upon reasonable request.

Funding. No funding was received to conduct this research.

Conflict of interest. The author does not have any potential conflict of interests that may influence the decision to publish this article.

Author Contributions. The study was conducted independently.

Consent for Publication. The authors jointly consent for the manuscript to be published by the journal.

Open Access. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

References


© Kyuchukov, H.
Теорія научуваності та знання мов сільськими ромськими...


Stefanova, M. (2001b). Kam vaprosa za percepciyata na bulgarskiya ezik pri deci bilingvi s majchin romski ezik [Towards the issue of perception of Bulgarian language in bilingual children with Romani as a mother tongue]. In H. Kyuchukov (ed.), Psycholingvistichni i sociolingvistichni problemi na
АНОТАЦІЯ

Мета. Метою дослідження є вивчення теорії научуваності (Valiant, 1984) у процесі вивчення болгарської та чеської мов L2 ромськими дітьми дошкільного віку. Ромські діти зростають у багатій усній культурі і навчаються рідної мови від членів розширенних сімей, але як вони вивчають L2 і які фактори сприяють процесу оволодіння другою мовою (SLA), не зрозуміло.

Методи. 20 двомовних ромських дітей з Болгарії та 20 двомовних ромських дітей з Чехії (у двох вікових групах 4–5 та 5–6 років) були протестовані за допомогою лінгвістичних тестів на знання, зосереджених на їхній здатності вивчати нові граматичні категорії. Діти проходили тестування за спеціально розробленим тестом, враховуючи особливості ромських граматичних категорій. Ці ж граматичні категорії були протестовані державними мовами країн, де проживають діти – болгарською та чеською мовами.

Результати. Результати показують, що діти з Болгарії набагато краще вивчають болгарську мову, ніж ромські діти з Чехії, які вивчають чеську. Існує зв’язок між знанням ромськими дітьми своєї рідної мови та офіційної мови. Дани показують, що болгарські ромські діти набагато краще знають свою рідну мову, і це допомагає їм краще вивчати болгарську, в той час як чеські ромські діти порівняно погано знають чеську мову. Ромські діти, хоча мови різні, засвоюють різні стилістики мови.

Висновки. Дослідження показало, що засвоєння граматичних категорій нової мови в ранньому віці залежить від мовних знань та досвіду дитини в рідній мові. Нові знання в новій мові набуваються на основі старажитних знань у рідній мові. Це показано і в інших дослідженнях, наприклад, з турецькими двомовними дітьми, що знання рідної мови допомагають у вивченні нової мови.

Ключові слова: теорія научуваності, ромські діти, засвоєння другої мови, рідна мова, етнолект.