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## CODE-SWITCHING AMONG TRILINGUAL TURKISH-SPEAKING ROMA CHILDREN IN BULGARIA

The paper presents trilingualism among Turkish-speaking Roma children from Bulgaria and the processes of code-switching. The study examines the MLF Model of Myers-Scotton (1993), and shows that this model is not valid in the situation of bilingual (trilingual) children learning two/three languages simultaneously. They acquire the three languages as a single code, and are not aware of the processes of code-switching. This testifies to the non-applicability of the MLF Model of Myers-Scotton (1993) in the situation of trilingualism.

### **Introduction**

The Roma population in Bulgaria numbers approximately 800 thousand to one million people. They are mostly bilingual. Roma live mainly in cities, towns and villages. In the cities, they are concentrated in ghetto-like quarters, which in the majority of cases resemble hamlets with their own internal life and structure. In their everyday life, Roma communicate only in the Romani language but there are groups who communicate only in Turkish or only in Bulgarian. The Turkish-speaking Roma groups live in regions with the ethnic Turkish population, and the Bulgarian-speaking Roma live mainly in Sofia and the western parts of the country. In smaller towns and villages, there are groups who in their everyday life communicate in three languages – Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian. They live in the northeast and southern parts of Bulgaria. They have contacts with Turks and Bulgarians but consider themselves Roma. They are Muslims by religion.

In recent years, research in the area of Romani bilingualism in Bulgaria has intensified. More particularly, articles about the education and upbringing of bilingual children in kindergarten and school have been published. The interest in research on the acquisition of two or three languages, or early language socialization at home has

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increased. In various publications Kyuchukov (1999a, 1999b, 2000) has described the acquisition of Romani at home by very young speakers.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of the present study is to show how Roma children in Bulgaria, living in a multilingual and multicultural environment, acquire two or three languages from a very early age.

The report also aims at presenting the processes of early language socialization of Romani children growing up in multilingual (Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian) environments. The question we will try to answer here is: what is the role of code-switching in the language socialization of children?

Of late, the model of code-switching developed by C. Myers-Scotton (1993) (Matrix Language Frame Model) has drawn general attention. According to this model, the languages used by bilingual speakers are defined as a Matrix Language (L1) and an Embedded Language (L2). The MLF Model claims that bilingual people always use the morphological structure of the Matrix Language when they switch codes. For example, the ML in the next sentence is Bulgarian, however the speaker uses a Romani word as well, while the suffix of the word is from Bulgarian:

- |                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) <i>Na Kiro Japonetsa</i> | <i>čšave-ta-ta.</i>   |
| of Kiro Japanese            | <b>child</b> -ren-DEF |
| (ML)                        | <b>(EL)</b> (ML)      |
| BL*                         | <b>RL</b> BL          |
| The sons of Japanese Kiro   |                       |

In the present study I analyze the Myers-Scotton model and try to show how it can be applied in the conditions of trilingualism and communication in three languages – Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian – among very young Roma children.

### **Overview of the literature**

#### **In Bulgaria**

In Bulgaria there are few publications on language acquisition in early childhood. I. Georgov (1905, 1906, 1908 [after Stoyanova, 1992]) was to conduct research on Bulgarian child language development. In 1992, J. Stoyanova published a detailed study on Bulgarian language acquisition. She precisely described speech acts and adult-child interaction in early childhood.

The research and publications mentioned above are connected with Bulgarian language acquisition by monolingual Bulgarian children. There is no research on Bulgarian language acquisition by bilingual children in early childhood, nor is there any research on the language development of ethnic minority children.

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\* BL – Bulgarian Language; RL – Romani Language

### In other countries

Publications referring to Turkish language acquisition by Turkish children exist (Aksu-Koç and Slobin, 1986), but nowhere can one encounter publications or research concerning Turkish language acquisition by Roma children in early childhood.

In the West European psycholinguistic literature, there are a number of publications on the question of simultaneous acquisition of two languages from birth (de Houwer, 1991; Grosjean, 1982). These publications aroused my interest in Roma children in Bulgaria who acquire three languages at a very early age. In earlier publications, Kyuchukov (1997, 1999b) showed the acquisition of Romani, but has just one publication (Kyuchukov, 1994a) on trilingualism of Muslim Roma children.

In various publications, Kyuchukov (1994b, 1999a) applies the model of Myers-Scotton for determining the Matrix and Embedded Languages in a bilingual environment – Turkish-Romani and Gagaouz-Bulgarian. The question posed here is whether the model is universal and whether it can be applied in the conditions of trilingualism. Before tackling these questions, I will first try to summarize the publications concerning code-switching in the sphere of early language socialization of children.

According to Gardner-Ghloros (1990), there is a relation between the patterns of code-switching and their functional motivation, as a number of studies have demonstrated. Many authors ascertain that at the lexical level children switch codes more frequently than do adults from the same social group. It appears that children are less capable of concealing lexical gaps in their speech than are adults. Code-switching of adults is more complex and depends on their discourse skills, as yet undeveloped in children.

Schieffelin (1994) describes the processes of code-switching in a Creole-speaking family from Haiti living in New York City. Parents' speech directed to their children is mainly in Creole, and sometimes they speak variants of English, Spanish or French. In this case, this family uses code switching as an English language learning strategy.

Reger and Berko-Gleason (1991) describe how Romani parents from Hungary speak to their infants. There are also cases of code-switching.

- |            |                           |                            |
|------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2) Mother: | <i>Kaj sanas?</i>         | Where were you?            |
| Child:     | <i>Me •ej ande bolta.</i> | I am going to the grocery. |
| Mother:    | <b><i>Minek?</i></b>      | <b>What for?</b>           |

The conversation is carried on in Romani, but the mother switches to Hungarian as well (the word *minek* 'what for').

In his latest study, Kyuchukov (2000) researches the patterns of code-switching between Romani and Bulgarian in adults' speech when they communicate in Romani with their children. The following example is from a mother-child interaction from Bulgaria and in bold are given the words in Bulgarian.

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| 3) Mother: | <i>Manges <b>li</b> te •as te <b>pazaruv</b>-inas?</i> |
|            | Would you like to go shopping?                         |

Here within the Romani sentence there are the Bulgarian words: *li* (question forming word in Bulgarian) and *pazaruvam* (shopping).

## The data

### The studied children

In this research, three Turkish-speaking Roma children from Northeast Bulgaria were observed. Their ages are 30 months, 31 months and 37 months. The parents spoke to their children in the Northeastern Turkish dialect at home. The children have Turkish-Arabic and Bulgarian names as a result of the change of Bulgarian Muslim names in 1985. When communicating with them adults and their parents use both their Turkish-Arabic and Bulgarian names. In everyday communication with the children, the three languages are spoken – Turkish, Bulgarian and Romani, but Turkish is the dominant language.

- Hristo (Hyusein) – 31 months old, male
- Sonya (Sanie) – 30 months old, female
- Seslav (Selim) – 37 months old, male

### The methodology

The method applied for data collection is „participatory observation”, i.e. the observer takes part in the conversations with the children, and keeps a diary of the conversations between mother and child. The participant’s observations are audio-recorded and subsequently are transcribed and analyzed.

### The data analysis

As is known, the child utters his or her first meaningful words in the first year. These words may be onomatopoeic, as for instance: „mew” means cat, „wow” means dog, „mama” means mother, etc.

Uttering a word that represents a sentence, and making a corresponding gesture, is regarded as a higher level of development. At the one-word stage, children name not only the objects themselves but also the role they perform in the given situation.

This phenomenon was closely observed with Hristo (Hyusein) (31 months old). For example:

- (1) *keş* („kes” means ‘cut’ in Turkish) and gives his mother a knife;
- (2) *čhučhi* („chuchi” means ‘nursing bottle’ in Romani) and points to the nursing bottle and wants to eat;
- (3) *vish* („vizh” means ‘look’ at in Bulgarian) and points to the television set.

The semantic roles in one-word utterances can be presented in the following table according to Stoyanova’s (1992) classification:

Table 1. Classification of the Hristo's utterances

Semantic role	Utterance	Context
AGENT	<i>buba</i> (T) 'dad' <i>mami</i> (R) 'grandmother'	<i>He sees a man.</i> <i>He saw his grandmother entering the room.</i>
OBJECT	<i>čhučhi</i> (R) 'nursing bottle' <i>pa</i> (B) 'money'	<i>When he wants the nursing bottle.</i> <i>When he wants coins.</i>
ACTION	<i>düttü</i> (T) [ <i>düştü</i> ] 'falls down' <i>gitti</i> (T) 'went away'	<i>When the handle falls down.</i> <i>When the mother goes out of the room.</i>
VOCATIVE	<i>nine</i> (T) 'mom' <i>mami</i> (R) 'grandmother'	<i>When he wants something.</i>
RECIPIENT	<i>aba</i> (T) [ <i>abla</i> ] 'sister' <i>buba</i> (T) 'dad'	<i>When he gives something.</i>
OWNER	<i>meni</i> (T) [ <i>benim</i> ] 'my'	<i>When he shows a toy.</i>
POSITION	<i>oti</i> (T) [ <i>otur</i> ] 'sit down' <i>beš</i> (R) 'sit down'	<i>When he points to the bed.</i>

His utterances are of course not always clearly pronounced. He also uses words and expressions typical of child language. For instance:

Utterance	Meaning
<i>danda</i>	'a guitar, an accordion'
<i>pripri</i>	'water'
<i>bruma</i>	'a truck, a toy'
<i>mei</i>	'meat, a sheep'
<i>tis</i>	'a cat'
<i>didish</i>	'a new garment'
<i>gugu</i>	'something that scares him'
<i>taf</i>	'a toy gun'
<i>yof</i>	'warm, hot'

This is the age when the first phrases appear in child language as well. Hristo (Hyusein) uses phrases from three languages – Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian.

1. *Aba, koy! Aba, aba, koy!* (T) – he points to the table. „aba” /*abla*/ means 'sister' and „koy” means 'put' in Northeastern Turkish dialect.  
'Sister put, sister put!'
2. *Mami beš!* (R) – he points to a chair. „mami” means 'grandmother' and „beš” means 'sit down' in Romani dialect.  
'Grandma, sit down!'
3. *Vish, vish!* (B) – he points to the television. „vizh” means 'look' at in Bulgarian.  
'Look at, look at!'

There are often cases of „borrowing” words from one or another language, which is characteristic for bilingual communities. For example, the child says:

1. *Mami, konche!* (R-B)  
 ‘Grandma, horse!’ instead of: *Babo, konche!* (B) or *Mami, grast!* (R); „mami” is a Romani noun for grandmother, and „konche” is the Bulgarian noun for horse;

In the child’s Romani vocabulary, the word „horse” does not exist and he uses its Bulgarian and Turkish counterparts.

2. *Mami, geigi.* (R-T) – the child wants to play horse with his grandmother.  
 ‘Grandma, horse!’; „mami” is a Romani noun. „geigi” (*beigir*) means horse in Northeastern in Turkish dialect in Bulgaria.

Sonya (Sanie) (30 months) is at a higher level of language development. She is able to generate simple sentences but often mixes their word order. She formulates sentences in Turkish and Bulgarian but there are cases when she borrows words from one or the other language. For example:

1. *Kuzular barie.*  
 lamb-s cry  
 ‘The lambs are crying.’  
 This is a Northeastern Turkish dialect in Bulgaria.
2. *Burda var araba.*  
 here there is car  
 ‘Here there is a car here.’  
 This is also Northeastern Turkish dialect in Bulgaria.

In this sentence, the word order is influenced by the Bulgarian language. In Turkish, the verb is always placed at the end of the sentence /SOV/ whereas the word order here is SVO. Sonya has acquired one-word sentences from Bulgarian. For example:

1. *Mesho, mesho.*  
 ‘Bear, bear.’

She says „mesho” instead of „mecho” (meaning ‘bear’ in Bulgarian), i.e. she substitutes the sound /ch/ for /sh/.

2. *Mamo, mamo.*  
 ‘Mommy, mommy.’

In comparison with the sentences in Turkish, the Bulgarian sentences are at an earlier stage of development. There are sentences formed with borrowings from Bulgarian or Turkish in Sonya’s vocabulary as well. For instance:

1. *Bu* (T) *kotka* (B)!  
'This is a cat' – points to the cat.
2. *Bebenche, bebenche* (B), *dilisine bak* (T)!  
'Baby, baby, look at his tongue' – and shows a picture of a baby.
3. *Meme* (T) *ne iskam* (B)!  
'I do not want a nursing bottle' – and throws it away.

These examples show that the child understands the structure of the sentence in general but she does not as yet distinguish between the two languages.

The mistakes in Sonya's utterances are typical for her age – not very clear articulation, substitution and omission of sounds. There are words characteristic of children's language in Hristo's as well as in Sonya's speech.

The three children are thus at different stages of language development. Hristo (31 months) is at the level of word-sentence formation; i.e. naming an object and pointing to it is equal to a sentence. Some of the words he uses are in Romani and others are in Bulgarian, while the basic language of communication is a Turkish dialect.

At this age, he makes his first attempt to combine two words. Here, the second one is invented by him.

1. *Buba didiş*. (T)  
'Dad beautiful.'

„Didiş” is a word invented by Hristo and in his vocabulary, its meaning is a beautiful. Some of his sentences are formulated in Romani only:

2. *Mami beš!*  
'Grandma, sit down!'

Sonya (30 months) is at the stage of correctly formulating syntactic constructions and switches codes at a syntactic level. For example, when she sees a cat, she says:

1. *Bu* (T) *kotka* (B).  
'This is a cat.'

When she looks through a book together with her mother, she explains:

2. *Bunar* (T) *mesho, mesho*(B).  
*Mesho* instead of *mecho* in her language is „a bear” so she says:  
'These are bears.'

Seslav (Selim) is 37 months old. He is at a more advanced stage of language development in comparison with the two other children. His conversations with his father were observed. While going through a child's book, his father asks:

1. Father: *Adi bakalim burda ne var?* (T)  
'Let's see, what we've got here?'
- Child: *Baba.* (B)  
'Grandmother.'
2. Father: *Bu ne burda?* (T)  
'What is this here?'
- Child: *Mechka.* (B)  
'Bear.'
- Father: *E bunar?* (T)  
'And this one?'
- Child: *Peperudka.* (B)  
'Butterfly.'

In Seslav's conversation with his father, we can observe simultaneous switching of codes between Turkish and Bulgarian as well as Turkish and Romani.

3. Father: *Orda ne var?* (T)  
'What do you have there?'
- Child: *Mami (R) var orda.* (T)  
'Grandmother is there.'
- Father: *Başka?* (T)  
'What else?'
- Child: *Papu.* (R)  
'Grandpa.'

The above examples indicate that almost always children borrow nouns from Bulgarian or Romani. If we compare our research with others concerning trilinguals, we conclude that (according to Clyne, 1997) trilinguals use the same mechanisms and processes as bilinguals but the additional language complicates the communication. Clyne's research (1997), which involves trilingual adults from Australia (Hungarian-German-English, Dutch-German-English and Italian-Spanish-English), shows that they do not use the three languages with equal frequency in their everyday communication. In our case, Sonya appears to be more bilingual than trilingual. She only mixes Turkish with Bulgarian, whereas Hristo and Seslav switch from Turkish to Bulgarian as well as from Turkish to Romani. However, the children do not as yet realize that there are three separate codes. In their minds, contrary to the adult Australians, the three languages form one common code.

## Conclusion

The empirical data analyzed here provide useful information about the language development of trilingual children. In the process of simultaneous acquisition of two or three languages, they are at different stages of development – one may be at the



level of formulating one-word sentences, while another may be at the level of generating two-word sentences.

Borrowing words from another language is a natural process for bilingual children. Children pay little heed to word order at the stage of generating two- or three-word sentences.

We conclude that people from different cultures have different attitudes towards bilingualism/trilingualism in an individual. In different cultures, there is variation in communicative skills as well as the evaluation of early skills acquired by children in domestic environments (Haslett, 1989).

According to Schieffelin (1994), early language socialization of children depends on their verbal surroundings. In this case, the language of Turkish-speaking children with Romani background is full of code-switching between Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian, which in their minds appears to be a single code. In this respect, the Myers-Scotton's MLF Model (1993) turns out to be inadequate, i.e. it is not universally applicable as it is claimed to be.

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