VERSITA

HUMAN AFFAIRS *22*, 510–523, 2012
DOI: 10.2478/s13374-012-0041-0

THE ROMANI LANGUAGE IN THE SLOVAK EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

TINA GAŽOVIČOVÁ

Abstract: The paper analyses the use of the Romani language in the Slovak educational system. It focuses on the informal use of Romani in schools, as about 10% of all pupils speak Romani as their mother tongue but there are no schools that use Romani as the language of instruction. The theoretical framework draws mainly on the work of P. Bourdieu and S. May on the symbolic power of language. The empirical chapter is based on qualitative data collected at ten primary schools in different parts of Slovakia, as well as interviews with decision makers and experts. On the basis of the empirical research, three questions are posed. (1) Is Romani used in schools and if so how? (2) What attitudes do school staff have on the use of Romani? (3) Is the theory of Stephen May applicable to Slovakia and is Romani perceived to have merely sentimental value while Slovak is considered to have instrumental value? The article concludes that the perceived value of Romani in Slovakia is very low. From the point of view of school staff, it has no instrumental value and is perceived as a barrier rather than a benefit.

Key words: Romani language; education; minority language; majority language; symbolic power of language

Introduction

This paper deals with the use of Romani in the Slovak educational system. Although the Roma national minority in Slovakia has the constitutional right to use its language in education, there are no schools where Romani is the language of instruction (see chapter 4.2). Also there are very few schools that teach a written form of Romani. Therefore the paper focuses on the informal use of Romani in primary and lower secondary education (elementary schools with grades 1-9).

Language is a crucial tool for social interaction and learning. When pupils speak a different mother tongue and do not know the language of instruction in their school, this is a substantial barrier for education. If the majority of the children in the class speak the same mother tongue, it is more difficult for them to learn the language spoken by the teachers. Besides, language is more than simply a tool for communication. It has important symbolic power and is part of a person's identity. The theoretical framework presented in this paper is based mainly on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Stephen May on the symbolic value of language.

The paper analyses part of the data from qualitative research conducted by the Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture in 2011-2012. The author of this article was coordinator and member of the research team and co-author of the final analysis of this project. The research focused on different tools in the educational system designed to help the education of children from marginalized Roma communities. One of the tools analysed is the Romani language. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in ten schools. Furthermore, focus groups were conducted with state administration representatives and experts on the education of Roma children.

The focus lies on the informal use of the Romani language and the practices and attitudes of staff. In which situations is Romani used in schools? For what purpose? What value does the language have as perceived by Slovak society?

Analytical framework

> Why does multilingualism and language contact entail so much emotional reaction? The answer lies not in the practical communicative realm, but in the symbolic function of language […] (Spolsky 1998, 57).

There are two main features of language. Firstly, language serves people as a basic means of communication. Secondly, it has important symbolic power.

Language in its verbal form is used for face to face communication. The written form of language enables communication across time and space. The *Encyclopaedia of World Languages* records over 7 000 languages (Lewis 2009). Each language existed in an oral form first. The establishment of a written form, the process of codification, requires institutions and the power to spread it. This is how official language forms and dialects diverge, since dialects are forms of a language that differ from the codified official form. The relation between the official form and dialects, as well as between different languages, is always a power relation.

The symbolic power of language is not as evident as the communicative function. Language is not solely a mean of participating in social interaction; to a great extent it influences and constructs our social reality. According to Bourdieu (1991), any language competence is relational. Speaking a language means having a linguistic habitus.

> Linguistic exchange […] is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit (Bourdieu 1991, 66).

It is the goal of the state to create a "unified linguistic market" so that the "state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured" (Bourdieu 1991, 45).

Similarly, Stephen May writes about the symbolic power of language and the value it is perceived to have (May 2003). According to May, majority and minority languages are perceived differently. While the majority language is considered a "vehicle of modernity" and learning it has "instrumental value", the minority language is regarded only as a "carrier

of culture and tradition" and keeping it has only "sentimental value" (May 2003). Further, learning the minority language is considered an obstacle to social mobility and can cause "ghettoization" and "the choice between opting for a majority or minority language is constructed as oppositional, even mutually exclusive" (May 2003, 135). May is opposed to this conception of the minority language and proposes two main counterarguments. Firstly he says that this argument "*confuses cause and effect*" (p. 136) since the use of the minority language itself does not cause the marginalization of the minority, but the marginalization of the language is already one aspect of the marginalization of the minority. Secondly, he identifies a point of inconsistency in this argument. On the one hand, the opponents of minority language rights perceive the minority language as lacking instrumental value. However, at the same time they do not allow it to have instrumental value since it is mainly the state, or those in power who are able to decide the extent to which the language is used officially. May illustrates this using a case from Britain where those who oppose such rights

> bemoan […] the labour market advantages of those with an educational qualification in the Welsh language because local authorities increasingly require knowledge of Welsh as a condition of employment (May 2003, 137).

So May concludes:

> [T]hese exact arguments are made without apology by […] egalitarian liberals […] on behalf of majority languages. They simply can't have it both ways: deriding minority languages for their lack of utility, and then opposing their utility when it proves to be politically inconvenient" (*ibid.*).

This article attempts to answer the question of whether the status of the Romani language in Slovakia involves this kind of conflict and whether there is a similar perception of the minority and majority languages.

Symbolic exclusion in curricula

Pedagogical theory differentiates between three types of curricula: explicit, implicit and null curriculum (Eisner 1994). An *explicit curriculum* is based on policies and guidelines. An *implicit curriculum* includes what pupils learn at school in addition to the explicit curriculum. A *null curriculum* involves everything that is not included in school teaching and is thus ignored by the school. According to Milner (2010), this is the most powerful one. The fact that some subjects are not studied—the null curriculum—signals to the pupils (although perhaps subconsciously) that the topic is either not important or that it is inappropriate to study it and/or to discuss it. To use the words of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 41):

> pedagogical work tends to impose recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant culture on the members of the dominated groups or classes, it tends at the same time to impose on them, by inculcation or exclusion, recognition of the illegitimacy of their own cultural arbitrary.

Therefore the absence of the language the pupils speak at home in the school environment and school curricula imposes a strong message about the "legitimacy of the dominant culture" and therefore the subordinate position of their own minority culture and language.

This is mainly true for speakers of national minority languages that have no other contact with the standardised form of their mother tongue. This too has to be taken into account when analysing the role of a minority language in education.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is generally considered to be the ability of a person to speak more than one language. Further several categories have been defined to describe differences in bilingual competence such as ideal (or balanced) and partial bilingualism. Currently most authors agree that the level of competence the speaker has in the particular languages almost always differs; for instance the vocabulary may differ resulting from the use of the languages in different environments (home, school, sports…) (Garcia 2009).

Another category used in scholarly literature is *folk* and *elite* bilingualism. Folk bilingualism refers to cases where a person firstly learns his/her mother tongue and then the official state language (e.g. Roma in Slovakia learning Slovak). On the other hand elite bilingualism describes a situation where people learn a language that is not necessarily used in that state, but has a higher status (e.g. Slovaks learning English) (Gaarder 1977 in Paulsten, Tucker 2003, 461). In different situations languages can belong to both categories. Spanish, for example, is taught as part of *elite* bilingualism in Europe, while in the USA it is the language of a language minority. Elite bilingualism will not be further discussed in this paper.

Methodology

Data collection

This article analyses empirical data collected as part of a project entitled "Measures to improve the education of Roma children—are they truly inclusive?", which was conducted by the Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture between October 2011 and March 2012 with the financial support of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic. The author of this article was coordinator, member of the research team and co-author of the final analysis of this project.[1]

The qualitative research included data collection conducted at ten elementary schools in different regions of Slovakia. The schools were chosen depending on the following criteria. All the schools had to have a zero grade[2] and a teaching assistant, and be attended by pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment (SDE)[3]. From the list of all the schools that fulfilled these conditions, schools were selected to be as diverse as possible regarding

[1] The final analysis is to be published in 2012.

[2] Zero grade is part of elementary schooling and is attended by children who are already of compulsory schooling age (6 years), yet do not fulfill the criteria for school maturity. Children attend on the basis of psychological testing and parental agreement. Zero grades are attended mainly by children from marginalized Roma communities.

[3] Selected using statistics from the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education, for the school year 2010/11.

Table 1. The list of schools included in the research

	Region	Number of pupils	Percentage of children from SDE[4]	Size of town	Others
1	Prešov region	300–500	50 %–75%	1 000–5 000	
2	Prešov region	100–300	50 %–75%	10 000–50 000	
3	Prešov region	< 100	> 75%	< 1 000	Only grades 1-4
4	Košice region	> 500	< 25%	> 100 000	
5	Košice region	> 500	> 75%	1 000–5 000	
6	Košice region	100–300	50 %–75%	1 000–5 000	
7	Žilina region	> 500	< 25%	1 000–5 000	
8	Žilina region	300–500	< 25%	50 000–100 000	
9	Banská Bystrica region	> 500	50 %–75%	5 000–10 000	Language of instruction: Hungarian
10	Bratislava region	300–500	< 25%	> 100 000	

the region of Slovakia; the size of the village/town; size of the school and the language of instruction (Slovak or Hungarian).

Five teams each consisting of two researchers conducted the field research. Each team visited two schools and spent two days at each. They conducted semi-structured interviews with the school principals, teaching assistants, zero grade teachers and other class and special needs teachers. Together around 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each researcher also took notes of the observations. The schools that participated were guaranteed full anonymity.

The interviews focused on several educational policy tools that are being implemented to improve the education of Roma children. Besides other educational policies (e.g. teaching assistants, multicultural education, etc.), they focused on the formal and informal use of Romani and on the attitudes of the respondents towards Romani as the mother tongue of the school pupils. The main research question was: "Does the school use the Romani language as a tool for inclusion in any way?"

In addition, two focus groups (FG) were conducted. The respondents of the first FG were state administration representatives. The second FG took place with independent experts on the education of Roma children. Other than the data obtained from this research, the author conducted interviews with one of the few schools in Slovakia that teaches Romani as a subject.

Data analysis

This article will analyse the data collected and consider three main questions: firstly, how is Romani used in schools? This also addresses the issue of whether teachers and other school employees speak Romani and in what situations the language is used. Secondly, it

[4] A Socially Disadvantaged Environment.

addresses issues more relevant to the symbolic power of languages, particularly the attitudes school employees hold on the use of Romani. Thirdly, it asks whether the distinction between the instrumental and the sentimental value of certain languages, as described by May (May 2003), is applicable to the case of Slovakia and the Romani language.

The research focuses on the education system and its representatives. It follows a top-down perspective in political science research.

The research is based on general qualitative analytical practice (see e.g. Wertz 2011). Firstly, the data was critically evaluated. Drawing on experiences from previous research and the methodology for selecting the schools, the data were considered suitable for meaningful analysis. The focus in interpreting the data was on an "empathic understanding of the meanings expressed by the participant" (Wertz 2011, 369). Through the process of *emergent ideation* (Wertz 2011, 370), the main findings were identified. These were then further re-evaluated to check their relevance to the research questions. The findings are illustrated using direct quotations.

The Roma and Romani in Slovakia

The Roma minority

There is no exact data on the number of Roma in Slovakia, since the law does not allow the collection of any kind of ethnic data. The only exception is self-declared nationality; however, many of those considered Roma declare themselves as Slovak (or Hungarian). Therefore any data on the number of Roma pupils or on the use of Romani are only estimates.

According to official statistics, less than 2% of the Slovak population declares itself as Roma[5]. In contrast, more realistic estimates state that there are between 320 000[6] and 450 000[7] Roma living in Slovakia. This data suggests that the Roma national minority constitutes 6% to 8% of the overall Slovak population.

According to a quantitative UNDP study (2006), almost 40% of the Roma population is aged fewer than 15. The same UNDP research suggests that more than 50% of Roma speak Romani as their mother tongue. Only less than a third speak Slovak as their mother tongue and about 13% Hungarian. Provided this data is correct for the whole Roma population in Slovakia, up to 18% or 26% of all children attending compulsory schooling in Slovakia are Roma and half of them, 9% to 13% of all children, speak Romani as their mother tongue[8].

However, it is necessary to add that the major weakness of these UNDP estimates is the fact that they are mainly representative of the section of the Roma population that lives in marginalized communities, and this constitutes only about a third of all Roma living in Slovakia. Taking into account the Roma population as a whole, the percentage of those aged

[5] Census 2012.

[6] Atlas of Roma communities 2004.

[7] Prognoses for the year 2012 (Vaňo 2002).

[8] If 40% are aged between 0 and 15 years, then approximately 25% are at the compulsory schooling age (6-15 years). A quarter of the estimates 320 000 to 450 000 would mean about 80 000–112 500 Roma pupils. The overall number of pupils in elementary schools in Slovakia is 434 477 (ÚIPŠ).

between 0 and 15 and the percentage of those speaking Romani is most probably lower than that given for the marginalized communities. Therefore the overall number of Roma children and those speaking Romani would be lower.

The Roma minority has national minority status and therefore has the constitutional right to education in its own language. Although in size the minority is comparable to the largest and most powerful national minority in Slovakia—the Hungarians—their situation is completely different. While 7% of all pupils in Slovakia attend schools in which Hungarian is the language of instruction, there is not a single school in Slovakia in which Romani is the language of instruction[9]. Besides, there are very few schools that teach the written form of Romani as a school subject[10]. Therefore children whose mother tongue is Romani attend schools where the language of instruction is different (Slovak or Hungarian) and they never learn the written form of Romani. Further, they learn other foreign languages (mainly English). The comparative disadvantage of the Roma minority is that they do not have a patron state and dissemination of the standardised form of Romani is therefore much more difficult (e.g. Hungarian schools in Slovakia are able to use textbooks from Hungary).

Many studies have shown the long-term failure of Roma children, and especially children from marginalized Roma communities, in the educational system in Slovakia (see Friedman et al. 2009; Hapalová, Daniel 2008; Tomatová 2004, etc.). In this context experts refer to a number of interrelated issues including the low education and low socio-economic status of the families, low pre-school attendance rates, prejudice and discrimination against Roma from the majority population including non-Roma school staff, the segregation of Roma pupils in Roma-only classes and the disproportionally high percentage of Roma pupils in special schools. However, the aim of this paper is not to elaborate further on these issues. This article focuses exclusively on Romani and the attitudes of schools towards its use.

The Romani language

Romani is an indo-European language related to Hindi. There are about 6 to10 million Roma living in Europe, most of them in Central and Eastern European countries. There are many dialects of the Romani language and most of them are mutually intelligible. The Romani language was used for centuries without being codified. Recently, in many countries Romani communities produced their own standardized written form of Romani, usually using grammar related to the majority language in the particular country. Although there has been an attempt to codify a single international version of Romani for all Europe; this version is marginal in Slovakia.

In Slovakia[11], Romani was standardized in the 1970s by a leading expert on the Roma language M. Hübschmannová. Officially, the language was symbolically codified again

[9] Own calculations based on the statistics from ÚIPŠ 2011.

[10] To my knowledge, these are currently the only schools where Romani is taught as a subject: Galaktická private elementary school and high school in Košice; Dolná private high school and elementary school in Kremnica, the private pedagogical and social academy in Košice and the Exnárová conservatory in Košice.

[11] At that time Czechoslovakia.

in 2008. Currently there are several books on Romani grammar as well as some Romani textbooks. However there is no pedagogical faculty in Slovakia where students might graduate as Romani teachers. Also, there are no textbooks that use Romani as the language of instruction for other compulsory subjects (such as science, history, etc). These are the main official reasons why there are no schools where Romani is the language of instruction.

Attitudes and practices in the use of Romani in schools

Language as a mean of communication

As other research has shown (see e.g. Hapalová, Daniel 2008, etc.), children from marginalized Roma communities are often faced with a serious language barrier when starting school. Pupils that speak Romani at home, live segregated from ethnic Slovaks and do not attend kindergarten, have almost no knowledge of Slovak when they start school. The language barrier is also one of the main reasons that pupils are placed in zero grades.

> *They did not speak a single word Slovak. (...) I had to teach them using sign language as if they were deaf and dumb. But then it comes very quickly once they have learned the basics. After two months they are already starting to form sentences. Although they speak grammatically incorrectly when using the first person and first declination, but we already understand each other. After four months we already communicate normally* (Zero grade class teacher in Košice region).

This language barrier is overcome mainly due to the fact that teachers speak to the children in Slovak. The children, also due to their young age, acquire the language just by listening to it. The schools usually do not have any particular methodological tools for teaching Slovak as a second language. Besides teachers are not trained to teach Slovak to children who do not already speak the language. Other research has also shown that there is a lack of methods and textbooks for teaching Slovak as a second language (see e.g. Gažovičová 2011, 47-48).

Only rarely do teachers value the fact that Roma children become bilingual at a very early age and that they have to learn a completely new language. If this is acknowledged at all then it is usually expressed by Roma teachers. To cite the words of one:

> *It [Slovak] is a foreign language for them. And it is a great achievement that these children are able to learn so much in such a short time* (Roma teacher, Prešov region).

Most of the other teachers interviewed regard Romani as more of a barrier for the children.

In many schools none of the staff speaks Romani. If anyone does it is most commonly a Roma teaching assistant and less likely a teacher or school principal. These teachers use Romani mainly in order to make the teaching of Slovak more effective in the zero and first grade. They translate the Slovak expressions the children do not understand into Romani.

> *I used to have Romani interpreting cards. And when I didn't yet have the cards, I used a Romani primer. [...] When you use an expression they don't understand, the children can't remember it. [...] I have been teaching my kids only like this... we already knew the letter*

A because of angrusti [meaning ring in Romani]. *[...] This is not to reject Slovak, that has nothing to do with it, but it is a help in the beginning, while there is the language barrier. [...] They learn the language, because a language cannot be learned in a day, I come to school and know it. It is a long-term process that goes on until the last grade* (Teacher, Košice region).

Teachers who speak Romani and use it to teach children Slovak consider it very helpful. However, several respondents expressed the feeling that this attitude is not completely right and/or accepted. Several respondents spontaneously excused their own actions or mentioned that they might not be accepted. In the quote above this is illustrated by the sentence:

This is not to reject Slovak, that has nothing to do with it, but it is a help in the beginning, while there is the language barrier, or another remark by the same person: *Maybe the State Inspector would not like to see it [...]*

This was also mentioned in other interviews:

I never openly speak Romani in class. Because it is not a language that should be used in class (Roma assistant, Bratislava region).

The only Roma principal who participated in the research responded similarly.

I personally speak Romani, I am a Roma, and I try to talk to the children all the time in Slovak. It does happen when I'm explaining something and they don't understand so I say it in Romani so that they know, only in cases like that. But apart from that I try to communicate in Slovak, because I know Romani is not yet being taught in schools and so when they continue they need to have the basics, they need to know how to express themselves in Slovak (School principal, Prešov region).

To conclude, it is obvious that despite the positive experience teachers have with the use of Romani in teaching Slovak, they have often internalized feelings that Romani does not belong in schools.

Language and its symbolic power

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this paper, language is not simply a tool of communication, but it has an important role to play in power relations. The unknown evokes many emotions and these usually include fear and distrust. The same is true of Romani from the point of view of teachers who do not speak the language. This has been openly described by one school principal who, although not a Roma herself, did learn Romani.

When they [the children] *speak Romani […] and I understand what they are saying it doesn't bother me. It would be worse if I didn't understand and I didn't know what they were saying. That would make me anxious and suspicious. What if they were saying something they weren't supposed to say or were planning something they weren't supposed to?* (School principal, Košice region).

This quote is emblematic of the feelings many teachers share, yet do not speak about it so openly. In these cases, Romani becomes another source of distrust for the teachers.

The issue of knowing or not knowing the children's mother tongue is closely related to the teacher's authority. If the teacher does not speak the language of the pupils, not only will he or she distrust them, but it makes him/her vulnerable. Many teachers interpret that as a lack of authority. When there are Roma and non-Roma teachers in schools, it might lead to competition. This applies mainly where there is a non-Roma teacher and a Roma teaching assistant together in one class. The following quote from a non-Roma teacher at a school attended only by Roma children illustrates this:

> *I had a* [Roma] *assistant and I was not satisfied, it didn't suit me. This completely changed the authority of the teacher. They spoke Romani and I couldn't understand. She often had an advantage over me. And I really had a problem with it, also when I said something and the assistant wasn't there [...] the children just asked all the time: "Where is Didi?", meaning aunt in Romani* (Teacher, Prešov region).

At this school, they now have a non-Roma assistant, so at the school attended only by Roma children from a nearby segregated community, there is not a single staff member that speaks Romani.

The value of Romani

In many schools in Slovakia which are attended solely by Roma pupils or where there is a mix of Roma and non-Roma pupils, Romani does not feature in the education at all, or in communication with staff or in the school environment generally. As mentioned in the theoretical section, the absence of certain topics, *the null curriculum*, sends a strong symbolic message. When the language of the children is completely ignored by the school, it symbolically tells them the status of their identity and of themselves in society.

In the schools where the research took place, Romani only very rarely fulfilled a positive role. It was usually not used to build a positive and self-confident Roma identity and a positive relation to the Romani culture. Some of the few exceptions were Romani songs and sayings.

The opposite is true; Romani has rather a negative role and is often automatically associated with poor social and economic conditions, and poverty. The following quote is from a state administration representative responsible for the education of Roma children:

> *They* [the Roma pupils] *naturally speak Romani together […]. I don't think this is a good thing, because the language is some kind of cultural code. Slovak is the language the majority speaks and the majority certainly have higher ambitions. In their culture, where they speak only Romani, it is as if they are stuck in their worldview. […] However, when they speak Slovak well, they are also pulled up by the non-Roma pupils and they adopt their ideas that it is good to go to high school or university* (State administration representative, focus group).

These attitudes in society mean that sections of the Roma population give up their language and try to assimilate in order to integrate more easily in socio-economic terms and gain acceptance from the majority.

> *From year to year, at least I get the impression that they shout less and less in Romani. [...] I believe they are ashamed of it. Because many of the Roma families have class. And when*

they see what's on television, in the media, the uncivilized life, in such conditions. And they themselves know it is their fault. They know that. They don't want to admit that they belong there (School principal, Bratislava region).

Both these quotes reflect the fact that often the Romani language is considered to be inherently interconnected with exclusion and poverty and that many people believe (both Roma and non-Roma) that giving up the Romani language is therefore essential to socio-economic mobility.

Attitudes towards written Romani

As already mentioned, there is a codified version of Romani in Slovakia. However, only a very few schools teach Romani as a school subject and therefore very few Roma are familiar with the written form of their mother tongue. Where this is the case, the Romani language is mainly promoted by Roma teachers, assistants and principals. However, they convey the low value Romani has in Slovak society and therefore consider learning Slovak to be crucial and believe it should come first. For most of them, teaching the standardized form of Romani is less important and they therefore do not teach it.

It [the Romani language] *is important, but because the child grows up in the Roma community and understands it, it will never be lost, it will never forget Romani […] When the children are little, they need to learn Slovak instead because there is a big barrier* (Roma school principal, Prešov region).

Definitely yes [they would benefit from instructions in Romani]. *There would be no barrier, I would teach them in Romani, they would learn it and that's that, we'd get it. But where can they use it?* (Roma teacher, Prešov region).

This indicates the vicious circle of the non-use of Romani. As long as Romani is not taught or used in public institutions, knowledge of it is not considered "useful". However, once it is widely recognized that Roma children should also be taught Romani in schools so that they can be educated more easily, knowledge of official Romani will become an important comparative advantage on the labour market. The same is true of the use of Romani in other areas such as social work, local politics, media etc.

Summaries concerning the value of Romani in Slovakia

At the beginning of this article I posed three research questions: (1) Is Romani used in schools and if so how? (2) What attitudes do staff members have on the use of Romani? (3) Is Stephen May's theory applicable to Slovakia and is Romani perceived as having only sentimental value while Slovak is considered to have instrumental value? Drawing on the qualitative data I have come to the following conclusions. As there is no quantitative data, it is not possible to comment on the statistical relevance of the results. However, the qualitative data show meanings and understandings the interviewed respondents themselves give their actions.

Firstly, Romani is the mother tongue of many pupils at Slovak elementary schools. As the language of instruction is Slovak (or Hungarian), these children are faced with a severe

language barrier when entering the educational process. Moreover, there are many schools where none of the staff speaks Romani. If they do, it is usually only one or two of the staff members, most often a teaching assistant and less often a teacher or school principal. If anyone in the school speaks Romani, the language is used mainly to help children to overcome the language barrier and to teach them Slovak more effectively in the first or zero grades. There are very few schools in Slovakia that teach Romani as a subject. The data reveals that schools that use Romani informally do not use it as a tool to build a positive identity for the Roma children or to increase their self-esteem. Also, their bilingualism is not perceived as something useful and positive.

Secondly, schools and teachers that use Romani as an intermediary language have very positive results and consider it very useful. It is surprising that several of them have internalized feelings that Romani should not be part of school education and that in the interviews they spontaneously apologized for or doubted the use of Romani in schools. So symbolically, the Romani language continues to be *the null curriculum* and to be excluded from the formal educational process and the school environment. In some cases Romani also symbolically becomes a source of conflict between Roma and non-Roma teachers or assistants as some non-Roma teachers feel threatened by the stronger position of those who speak to the children in Romani.

Thirdly, Stephen May has written about the "instrumental value" the majority language in society is supposed to have in contrast to the "sentimental value" of the minority language. The data collected illustrates that this fully applies to the case of Romani in Slovakia as well. While Slovak is regarded as a means of achieving social mobility and prerequisite to any education, Romani is considered merely as a barrier. Moreover, Romani is very closely associated with poverty and social exclusion. Therefore, sometimes the opinion that the children should not speak Romani at all is sometimes expressed, because it is deeply related to their marginalization. So even the "sentimental value" May writes about is in doubt in this case. The contradiction May has written about is also fully applicable. There are very few Roma teachers in Slovakia and this is considered to be one of the main reasons why Romani is taught at so few schools. Also, Romani is usually not used at local government and other official levels. On the other hand, knowledge of Romani is usually not considered beneficial, nor is it to be supported and further developed. Therefore, the problem of the lack of qualified Roma who speak the standardised Romani is ongoing and it is creating a vicious circle of the marginalization of Romani.

Future research should focus on the attitudes of Roma families, children and parents on the use of Romani in education. Also the relationship between Roma ethnicity and Romani should be studied in more detail. There are Roma teachers and school staff members who do not speak Romani; on the other hand, there are few non-Roma who have learned Romani. In this research, I have not paid attention to the differences in the way in which these groups are perceived.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on the attitudes and practices of schools in Slovakia in relation to Romani as the mother tongue of Roma pupils. The research sample included ten elementary schools in Slovakia at which about 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted. In

addition, two focus groups were held with decision makers and experts on inclusive education and interviews were conducted at one of the few schools where Romani is taught. The research was conducted by the Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture in winter 2011/12.

In Slovakia the perceived value of Romani is very low. This can garnered from the official statistics. There are no schools where Romani is the language of instruction and there are only about five schools where Romani is a subject. For this reason, the research focused on the informal use of Romani in schools. The qualitative sample indicates that from the point of view of the teachers and staff, Romani has absolutely no instrumental value. In the vast majority of interviews, there was no indication that it might be possible for the children to learn the written form of Romani and to expand their vocabulary in Romani so that they might have more use of it in the future. Also, the bilingualism of the children is usually not considered to be of any benefit.

The research, similar to that previously conducted, has shown that the use of Romani is very limited and that only a few members of staff speak Romani. Although language is an important part of a person's cultural identity, Romani is usually not used in schools to build a self-confident Romani identity.

Although, according to the teachers themselves, using Romani as an intermediary language to teach Slovak brings positive results, many still maintain internalized feelings that Romani should not be part of school education. Symbolically, the Romani language continues to be excluded from the school environment.

I have concluded that the theories of Stephen May on the perceived "instrumental value" of the majority language and the perceived "sentimental value" of the minority language are fully applicable in the case of Slovakia. Romani is very closely associated with poverty and social exclusion and this is used as an argument to further marginalize the language. Although there is be a need for more teachers (and state officials, social workers, etc.) in Slovakia with a knowledge of Romani, there is rarely support for a thorough knowledge of standardized Romani in schools, because this is not considered useful knowledge. In this way, the vicious circle of the marginalization of the Romani language in Slovakia is maintained.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* London: Sage Publications.

Census 2012. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, http://portal.statistics.sk.

Eisner, E. (1994). *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs.* New York: Macmillan.

Friedman, E. et al. (2009). *School as a Ghetto.* Budapest: Roma Education Fund.

García, O. (2009). *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century. A Global Perspective.* West Sussex: Wiley – Blackwell.

Gažovičová, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Vzdelávanie detí cudzincov na Slovensku – potreby a riešenia.* Bratislava: Centrum pre výskum etnicity a kultúry – Nadácia Milana Šimečku.

Hapalová, M., Daniel, S. (2008). *Rovný prístup rómskych detí ku kvalitnému vzdelávaniu. Aktualizácia 2008.* Bratislava: Člověk v tísni – pobočka na Slovensku.

Lewis, P. (Ed.). (2009). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sixteenth edition.* Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: http://www.eth.

May, S. (2003). Misconceiving Minority Language Rights: Implications for Liberal Political Theory. In W. Kymlicka, A. Patten (Eds.). *Language Rights and Political Theory,* pp. 123-152. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

May, S. (2011). Language Policy. In M. Grenfell et al. *Bourdieu, Language and Linguistics,* pp. 147-169. London: Continuum.

Milner, R. (2010). Introduction. In R. Milner (Ed.). *Culture, Curriculum and Identity in Education,* pp.1-14. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Paulsten, C.B., Tucker, R. (Eds.). (2003). *Sociolinguistics: the Essential Readings.* Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Spolsky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tomatová, J. (2004). *Na vedľajšej koľaji. Je proces zaraďovania rómskych detí do špeciálnych základných škôl znevýhodňujúcim činiteľom?* Bratislava: Slovak Governance Institute.

ÚIPŠ – Ústav informácií a prognóz školstva. (2011). Štatistická ročenka – základné školy. Školský rok 2011/12. www.uips.sk

UNDP. (2004). *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World.* Human Development Report 2004. New York: UNDP.

Úrad splnomocnenca vlády SR pre rómske komunity. (2004). *Atlas rómskych komunít*. http://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk

Vaňo, B. (2002). *Prognóza vývoja rómskeho obyvateľstva v SR do roku 2025*. Bratislava: Infostat.

Wertz, F.J. et al. (2011). *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis.* New York – London: The Guilford Press.

Institute of Public Policy and Economics,
Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences,
Mlynske Luhy 4,
82105 Bratislava,
Slovakia
E-mail: gazovicova@cvek.sk