

Translanguaging Classrooms in Tiszavasvári

Goals of the project

Our project runs at the Magiszter Elementary School in Tiszavasvári, North-Eastern Hungary. The students attending this school use the Romani language in their families, besides of Hungarian. There are many ways of language socialization in the community, one of them utilizes almost only Romani language resources. Other language socialization strategies involve Romani and Hungarian language resources in different rates. Most of the students visiting the school live in a segregated settlement at the edge of the town.

As the school with Hungarian teaching language couldn't provide a space for the language spoken in the students' home, the achievement of Hungarian language performances became a priority. But this yielded moderate results. Actually, the dropout-rate was low, but only a small part of the students could get and keep a place in any secondary school.

Our sociolinguistic based project supports the school achievement with a new language pedagogy practice (and language ideology principles behind it). According to the translanguaging concept (García 2009), speakers usually referred to as bilinguals have a single and indivisible language repertoire (García 2014) just like monolinguals. Language resources are linked from the speakers' consciousness to more than one language, but speakers select freely among their resources and to the purpose of the communication best suited. This is the basis of the language pedagogy supported by us: instead of the development of Hungarian or Romani language skills, this concept supports social equality and competitiveness through the development of the whole repertoire (García-Kleyn 2016).

This goal is aimed by building on home language practices of the speaker: everyday ways of translanguaging in domains out of school become parts of the learning activity. Instead of the expectation to speak with language resources linked to standard Hungarian, the school adapts to the language practices of its students. This provides the feelings of cosiness and continuity, which leads to the sense of being secure and to more courageous, stratified and varied communication. The concept avoids the stigmatisation of any language resources and stops with perceiving school and standard language practices belonging inseparable together.

Due to the application of the practices, all the students have the possibility to speak within the jointly defined frameworks the way they can and/or want. Students also use the Romani language during the improvement of their general linguistic performances (García-Kleyn 2016: 24 – for example to summarize a text, to tell a story, to argument or to lead a dialogue) by coordination of the educators in their lesson activities.

For example, tasks as to give a Romani title for a text, or to summarize a Hungarian text in Romani orally or in writing, in addition to this, they can take notes in Romani or they help in Romani for slower students – the possibilities are almost endless.

According to the educators implementing the new practices the conditions are changing in the translanguaging lessons: students with otherwise low performances become the most active, they are gaining a sense of success. Students have often higher performances in Romani than in Hungarian: for example, according to the class teacher of the first grader, children segment words and sounds easier in case of Romani resources than in Hungarian. Ascertainments like this help educators link the same skills and attainments with the Hungarian language. Using Applying culturally relevant learning contents is also an important part of the translanguaging practices. Teachers with a translanguaging stance pay attention to the traditions and habits, to the life of the children's community. Students happily link their school and home life. Also in other ways it decreases the distance between the worlds of the school and the home (García-Keyn 2016). Translanguaging practices bring not only the home ways of languaging and

cultural contents, but also the older members of the community in school: adults appear as guest experts in the school. For example, in the ethic lesson, mothers explained stories about how a Roma family expect and get ready for the arrival of a little brothers. In other cases the adult members of the community become essential for preparing homework or other school tasks: the students have to collect cultural contents in Romani language in the community and present them both in Hungarian and Romani at school.

Implementation

The antecedent of the project is a multi-sited ethnolinguistic research taken in the community in Tiszavasvári defined in local discourses as Roma and carried out since February 2016 by a research group from the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (and in the academic year 2016/2016 by from the Roma College of the Reformed Church in Budapest). Until the end of 2017 we have been visiting 55 school lessons in the Magiszter Elementary School and in the kindergarten attended by the children of the community. We have been conducted sociolinguistic interviews with approx. 50 speech partners (teachers, parents) at school, in family homes and in common social places (17 hours of recordings). Furthermore the team performs participating observation, spends much time in the community in several formal (worships) and informal (playing football etc.) programs. The goal is to become acquainted with the language practices of the community.

After the publication of the first results (Heltai 2016), the headmaster (Erika Kerekesné Lévai) of the Magiszter Elementary School decided to experiment with the translanguaging principles and practices. As a result of her good experiences, she founded in cooperation with the leader of the KRE research group (János Imre Heltai) the Translanguaging Workshop in Tiszavasvári. Members are the educators of the school and the participants from the research group. The Workshop meets every month and aims to introduce, spread and strengthen good translanguaging practices at school. In parallel, we started a webpage for the project (translanguedu.hu), where we have uploaded all project-related documents. Our main purpose is to reach besides of (socio)linguistic and pedagogical experts a wider group of teachers, educators and other interested professionals. We are also counting on the interest of an international professional audience, so we run the webpage also in English.

In the academic year 2017/2018, we are gaining experience in some school subjects (primarily Ethics and Hungarian language) and in classes we elaborate the possibilities of input and output measurements, and strive for the dissemination of the program among parents, students and educators. School-starters (first grade elementary classes) are already learning by translanguaging principles and practices, one of the classes began in September, the other one in the second semester, end of January. These classes did two input tests about language competences: one by only standard ways of speaking and one by including the possibility of translanguaging, that is, to use resources linked to Romani during the test. Also from the academic year 2017/2018, we have extended our research activities by the observation of home and school language practices of another, only Hungarian speaking Roma community in the town of Tiszavasvári (responsible for the subproject is Bernadett Jani-Demetriou).

Depending on the experiences of the first year we plan to extend the project to a bigger part of the school, or rather the elaboration of a detailed program of translanguaging with nonstandard Romani resources also to use in other schools in Hungary and abroad. We report our experiences among other ways of multiplication with publications in Hungarian and in English. We are expecting from our project more school success for the children of the community not only regarding their Hungarian language practices, but also their entire school

studies. But most of all, with our program we hope to have an emancipating and motivating effect on the entire school life of these students.

Financing

In the academic year 2016/2017 the financing of the project ensued from the Roma College of The Reformed Church in Budapest. This extended to the travel, accommodation and meal costs of the participants from Budapest. Since the academic year 2017/2018 the project has become independent from the college and now it is self-financed by the participants.

Currently and in the near future we plan to include resources with the help of Hungarian and international applications from social and scientific area. Depending on their success we plan a standardised description of the project in form of a teachers' handbook or video repository with good practices, which can serve the support of Romani speaking children in any European contexts.

References

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