

## SOME ATTRIBUTES OF ROMANY LITERARY LANGUAGE

**Harčaríková P.**

*University of Prešov, Slovakia*

The contribution was written as a part of the grant project VEGA 1/0754/09 “Romany people in literature for children and youths in Slovakia”.

In the course of one's life, we constantly interact with those people with whom we share our living space. We are part of various types of communities. In most cases, family is the first and most essential of them. In family environment, we acquire our mother tongue and, when communicating, we make use of non-verbal means to a great extent. In this way, we build our language awareness, which becomes socialised very quickly. The community becomes unified and differentiated from other communities – this mainly concerns the ethno-significative function of language. Specific features of the influence of culture are discussed in Virostková (2008, p. 24), where she deals with this phenomenon within the area of journalistic texts. She claims that newspaper headlines should not be translated word for word, but rather pragmatically adapted to the tradition in question. Headlines should reflect the life of the particular nation.

Since specific components of verbalisation as well as the way of thinking are already conceived in the family environment, what could be referred to as “family culture” (the way of life and thinking) is formed, and a certain mode of cultural awareness is postulated, which is parallel to language awareness. Although there is no unified Romany language (with no single codification accepted world-wide) and individual Romany dialects have developed diversely, their language is essential to Romany identity. As Liégois claims: "When geographical borders are absent, language signifies adaptable social borders and reflects that an individual perceives his/her own community as the same as that of the person he/she is speaking to" (Liégois 1994, p. 56). It could, thus, be stated that the language used is understood as a significant feature of Romany identity.

Culture can be understood as a fixed, or gradually stabilising, way of life (life habits), thinking and feeling (Horecký, 2000, p. 3 - 6). These features can, in a common environment, be clearly defined, they are even more obvious especially when compared to other ethnic cultures, and that includes certain language components. Romany culture has always been significantly governed by cultural evolution and has never developed in complete isolation. In its development, Romany culture has been significantly influenced by two limiting factors: an external static influence of ever changing external natural environment as a consequence of millennia long nomadic culture of Romany people on the one hand, and internal dynamic factors with a tendency to modify adopted cultural elements and to reinterpret them in new contexts on the other (Ševčíková, 2003, p. 27). According to Horecký (2000), nomadic way of Romany life has resulted in the present Carpathian Romany language, which has no original words to signify such things as roof, window, stairs, nor cart or wheel. In spite of nomadic way of life, there are no original

words for points of the compass, or words to signify reading or writing (nor praying); it has no original numbers above five.

In our language environment, as many as 80% of Romany people speak the Slovak Carpathian Romany language. Naturally, it is not only used in everyday communicative events, but also in literary works. Fairy tales are the most typical and characteristic Romany literary forms. Storytelling has had a significant importance in the whole of Romany history. Even in Slovakia, settlements would organise public events several times a week, where men told stories in the largest room available. It was mainly attended by adults. At home, stories would be told to children by their mothers. These were serious as well as funny real stories, imaginary stories featuring kings or various supernatural beings. Fairy tales, thus, have kept Romany people company all their lives (Hlebová, 2009, p. 68 – 70). That is why this paper focuses on this literary form and some (lexical and stylistic) attributes of Romany literary language.

According to V. Zeman (2003), authors feel the need to express their opinions, thoughts and attitudes. As they are bilingual, they often substitute for the missing words (also in artistic works) with Slovak expressions. However, with their awareness of Romany identity getting stronger, they try to restrict excessive borrowing of Slovak words. When forming neologisms from Romany roots, authors mostly use analogical nomination, derivation and calques.

Analogical nomination is based on using an existing form as the base of a new word. Such a denomination is most frequently transferred by means of metaphor. Calquing of Slovak words is also a common way of forming neologisms, etymologically derived from Romany roots. Derivation, though, is the most common means of forming neologisms. Here, new lexical units are formed from Romany roots and original Romany suffixes. Nevertheless, neologisms in the Romany language are not only formed when a new phenomenon needs naming. They are also formed under the influence of purist tendencies – as an effort to replace borrowings in use by denominations of a "stronger Romany character" (Zeman, 2003). The standardisation of the Romany language in 2008 is here considered as an eligible norm, which was preceded by codification of the Romany language and the acceptance of a new orthographic norm in 1971.

The value system as well as specific features of Romany mentality (unrestrained life, respecting gender hierarchy and gender tradition, ancestry heritage, love towards children, money as the essential means of survival – cf. Ševčíková, 2003, p. 45) are also thematically reflected in the language of Romany stories and their stylisation. In the composition of Romany fairy tales, it can be observed that it is natural for man (regardless the ethnicity and the language used) to deal with stories. It seems that human thinking is universal in many aspects (this is consequently reflected in the language). I agree with the opinion of the authors of so-called "story grammar" (J. M. Mandler, D. E. Rumhart, R. Wilenský), of whom a cognitive-psychological approach is typical (narrative grammar). They presume that people store the basic story schemes in their memory, which they then use in the production and perception as necessary. The conception of Romany storytelling is, therefore, with regard to the form and composition, no different from storytelling in other languages. In the macro-composition of Romany fairy tales,

narrative writing technique prevails with its all typical attributes. Among its typical parameters are (Mistrík, 1989) cohesion – given by the plot continuity; explicativeness – feature excluding an enumerative technique; succession – given objectively – by the time, or subjectively – by the narrator (expressed by time conjunctions, adverbials, verb semantics); tense-reference – integration of the given defined plot in time, subjectivity – the prism of which is the narrator who, more or less, modifies a straightforward story.

To sum up, J. Horecký's idea (2000) could be presented which states that people use their language on the bases of their language awareness as well as cultural awareness. This can be at various developmental levels, but is always realised in discourse (in a broader sense also in literature – author's note), as man is zoon dialogikon, homo loquens, l'homme de la parole. And it is its discourse and episodic character manifested in Romany literature that calls to further research this attractive component of people, their language and culture.

### **Literature**

Hlebová B. Rómska kultúra v multikultúrnej a emocionálnej edukácii elementaristov. Pdf PU v Prešove, 3. zväzok edície KONTEXTY, Prešov 2009, - P. 68 - 70.

Horecký J. Človek a jeho jazyk. Esej čiže pokus o charakteristiku vzťahu. Jazykovedný časopis, 51, Bratislava 2000, - P. 3 – 6.

Liégois, J.-P.: Roma, Gypsies, Travellers. Council of Europe 1994.

Mistrík J. 1989. Štylistika. 3. vyd. SPN, Bratislava 1989. s. 271 – 313, 339 – 370.

Ševčíková V. Sociokulturní a hudebně výchovná specifika romské minority v kontextu doby. Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, Ostrava 2003, - P. 27 – 45.

Virostková B. Funkcie novinových titulokov s použitím precedentných textov (na podklade dennej ruskej a slovenskej tlače) : autoreferát dizertačnej práce, Prešov 2008, - P. 24.

Zeman, V. Rómsky jazyk – jeden zo znakov rómskej identity. Romano nevo ľil. 313 – 315. 14. roč. Bratislava 2003, - P. 2.

### **Summary**

People are part of various types of communities. In the family environment, they acquire mother tongue and a certain mode of cultural awareness, which is parallel to language awareness. The paper deals with some attributes of Romany literary language, while focusing on fairy tales (some lexical and stylistic phenomena) – the most frequent form in Romany folk literature. The paper is not conclusive; however, it highlights universal values of Romany literature, which calls for further research within Romany language and culture.