

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

Book review:

Hristo Kyuchukov, *Kognitivniyat podhod v obuchenieto po romski ezik (v preduchilishtna i nachalna uchilishtna vazrast)*

**[The cognitive approach in Romani language teaching
(in preschool and primary school)].**

Burgas: Fondaciya "Nauka i obrazovanie" 2009, 144 pp. [e-book]

The new monograph by Hristo Kyuchukov entitled *The cognitive approach in Romani language teaching (in preschool and primary school)* is the first comprehensive study on the educational problems of Roma children studying the Romani language on the European level. Most recent publications regarding Roma children in Europe focus on learning of the official languages of the countries where the Roma live. For the last 20 years Kyuchukov himself has written a number of publications dealing with this issue as well. But still the problems of Roma children learning the official languages remain unsolved. Many Roma children in many European countries drop out of school from very early ages because they are unable to acquire the necessary knowledge at school.

In his new monograph Hristo Kyuchukov presents a totally different approach to the educational problems of Roma children. As an Associate Professor in the Romani language at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, he carries out a large study with preschool and primary school Roma children. Most of them are from Bulgaria, where the focus is on the level of knowledge of Romani. Using the ideas of L. S. Vygotsky and J. Bruner as a theoretical background, the author carries out a study with 195 preschool children and 45 primary school children, testing their knowledge with a categorization test, the Candem Picture Memory Test, DELV, a semantic test, a sentence comprehension and sentence production test, a vocabulary comprehension and production test and a reading test. Kyuchukov also conducts interviews with teachers working with Roma children about their attitudes towards the bilingualism of Roma children and teaching Romani at school. The results from the different tests are presented in seven chapters.

Most of the Roma children of preschool age (between 3-6 years old) are successful in most of the tests in the Romani language and show progress with increasing age. Most of the Roma parents speak Romani at home to their preschool children and this is why the children are successful. Problems appear with primary school children, where a sizable group (approximately 30%) cannot pass the tests in the Romani language. The primary school children show deficits in comprehension and production in Romani. During primary school years the parents do not support their children to speak Romani, thinking this will cause them problems with learning the official language. However the children often do not acquire knowledge in Bulgarian properly, because they do not understand what the teachers are saying. Thus, the children do not have good command of the Romani language, but also do not understand Bulgarian which the teachers use at school. In this way the primary school children have deficits in Romani and deficits in the official language. In his monograph Kyuchukov urges institutions (universities and the Ministry of Education) to prepare bilingual teachers, who can develop both languages of the children and create balanced bilinguals.

Kyuchukov's book has an important role for all European countries because there are Roma migrants in almost all European states today, where the Roma children have to learn the official language of the country. In order for this process to be successful the message from the monograph of Hristo Kyuchukov is to start a well-planned and organized process of teaching Romani. Most of the non-Roma teachers working with Roma children also think the Romani language plays an important role in the children's cognitive development. These are the new Recommendations of the Council of Europe: to bring Romani language education to the level of modern European languages – with standard methods and books, for all European countries where the Roma live.

In this respect Hristo Kyuchukov's book is a new contribution to the cognitive aspects of language and contemporary psycholinguistics, bringing completely new knowledge regarding the Romani language and the process of teaching it.

References

Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 June 2009 at the 1061st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

*Encho Gerganov
New Bulgarian University, Sofia*