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Culture and Competence – An Example from the Roma Ethnic Group of the Rudiments of Identity Development

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Abstract

The Roma question in Slovakia has lost its specificity as the natural migration of citizens of European Union has confronted more western cultures with Eastern European Roma culture. Who are Roma people? Why do “Gypsies” differ? Which interpretations of Roma ethnic identity are the matter-of-fact and which are the matters of prejudice? Research was designed to obtain reliable facts about cultural specifics of Romani ethnic group so as to determine the borderline between the facts and prejudices in hitherto published interpretations Roma ethnic identity. The wider basis for interpreting Roma identity was derived from the survey conducted among Romas, eliciting culturally preferred areas of knowledge and culturally expected adaptive skills of a child brought up in the Roma family setting.

Introduction

Roma cannot be referred to in generic terms, as there are variety of Roma ethnic subgroups differing from each other by societal norms, habits and way of life. Relationships among the subgroups are tense (Bakalář, 2004). According to Horvátová (1998) there are the following Roma ethnic subgroups inhabiting Slovakia:

Slovak speaking Romas – Rumunger
Hungarian speaking Romas – Ungrikorom
Olasrom – Valachrom.

As well as there are various Roma subgroups there are also many interpretations and characteristics of this ethnic minority. Various authors often refer about Roma issues (manifest problems related to refusal of societal assimilation and integration) in a style that is far from unbiased description. Various myths have been created about the way of life of Roma communities, especially in the area of relationships and peculiarities within their families.

Frištenská et al. (1999, in Bakalář, 2004) points out at the absence of systematic rigorous research in the area Roma domain. She has also pointed at the recent emergence of the atmosphere of certain political incorrectness (or precariousness) of the topic, determined by authors' concerns about criticism of introducing racial context. An image has been fashioned that Roma representatives can themselves act independently in the area, thus having a monopoly on information. Frištenska adds that, based on the information vacuum, wider public is, instead of hard data, fed by estimates and half-truths which are neither articulate enough in explicating real matters nor sufficient as a basis for conceptualising plans of relief or reform.

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According to Dubayová (2001) ...with respect to supportive social, health and educational programs it is necessary to be familiar with and particular Roma subgroups and recognize the context which generates ethnically bound poverty as the one of specific problems related to cultural and social anthropology.

Myths or Logical Positivism?

There are many statements in the available literary sources, pointing out at the cultural features of Roma ethnic group.

Male and Female Duties

Most authors agree in that it is usually a female duty to provide care for their families.

Olas males do not work, poses trading skills and often live on trading; manual labour is humiliating for them (Lakatošová, 1994).

Olas Roma female is capable of cooking and caring for younger siblings since the age of twelve (Lakatošová, 1994).

“Filling gypsy’s stomach is in charge of woman who begs, steals, tells fortune from a palm, cards and casts a spell. Man never descends to begging, becomes thief only if his “trade” does not pay off” (Štampach, 1929. p. 42).

In great many Roma families it is woman who cares for dwelling, children, and often for livelihood. Man often idly observes wife as she is struggling for nourishment. Romas usually booze away their salaries and do not care for their family subsistence... (Davidová, 1965, p. 166-167).

Men earn their living by playing music or as day labourers; however most of the care for family rests on women shoulders. Men rarely take on subsidiary dirty jobs such as emptying septic tank (Řičan, 1998, p. 20).

Woman’s earnings are more regular than man’s earnings. Woman usually cares for daily needs of family members (Fraser, 1998, p. 255).

Upbringing within Family

In Olas families, children are guided to stealing from the early age. The art of stealing has thus become the value of itself (Lakatošová, 1994).

In families, we have recorded dilemmas between strict and hard discipline and indulgence towards smoking (Lakatošová, 1994).

The world of children is blended with that of adults. Child rapidly progresses in the area of developing social contacts. It becomes independent very early and is able to act on one’s own bat. Environment stimulates child to do certain activity (picking iron waste, sort it and sell it). Young boy works with his father, girl with her mother (Liégeois, 1997).

Roma children strive less for success (positive acceptance) within family. Girls are guided from the very early age to care for household, raising boys within family is less systematic and intentional (Viková, 1996, in Bakalář, 2004).

Requirements laid on girls and women are essentially much stricter than those laid on men. Women have larger range of duties and responsibilities including household maintenance and providing food.

Violent behaviour of boys is tolerated in Roma family, even if their hostility is aimed at their own sister (Tomová, 1995).

Methodology

We have conducted the research in the quest of determining the borderline between the facts and prejudices in interpretations Roma ethnic identity. In the course the research the following questions have been tackled:

Who are Roma people? Why do “Gypsies” differ? Which interpretations of Romany ethnic identity are the matter-of-fact and which are the matter of prejudice?

The main purpose of the research was to combine qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gain the following facts:

- cultural specifics governing education within Roma family;
- range of competencies and adaptive skills of Roma children preferred within their family or wider community setting;
- Roma parents' expectations and demands on the range of adaptive skills and competencies performed by their boys and girls.

1st stage - Ethnographic semi-structured interview

Goal

The goal of this stage is to compile *a comprehensive list of adaptive competencies of Roma children, as perceived by children's parents*. The product comprises a list of adaptive competencies, annotated for relevance to a function of children's sex and age.

Participants

Participants are recruited among 100 parents of Roma children of ages 6-12 in 10 different Roma communities, representing the widest possible distribution of geographic and socio-economic conditions.

Procedure

An interview is constructed to assess a broad range of adaptive competencies. Parents were asked in an interview, lasting approximately 120 minutes, to help us develop an inventory of adaptive competencies of Roma children age 6-12, both boys and girls. The outcome is a comprehensive set of adaptive competencies necessary for successful life in a Roma family, community or wider cultural context.

2nd stage – Questionnaire or structured interview

Goal

The goal of this stage is to transfer the list of adaptive competencies obtained in the 1st stage into an inventory - *questionnaire items*. The two questionnaires:

Adaptive Competencies of a Roma Boy - (ACRB - questionnaire 1) and Adaptive Competencies of a Roma Girl - (ACRG - questionnaire 2) were elaborated.

Participants

There were selected 100 Roma parents of children aged 8-12 from 10 different Roma communities, representing the widest possible distribution of geographic and socio-economic conditions.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered among the different group of parents in order to obtain the characteristics on their children's strengths and weaknesses. Taking into account high illiteracy of Roma population, the questionnaire was administered, in many Roma communities, as a structured interview. The parents were invited in the process of questionnaire administration to consider and assess the level of mastery of particular competence by their own child of certain age and sex. We assumed that Roma *parents' demands on preferred abilities of a child* of certain age, sex, as well as the *values accentuated in the family* or connected with everyday family life would be reflected in the mastery level of particular competence performed by a child, as a result of family's cultural and educational influence.

3rd stage – Statistical procedures

Processing of collected data in order to determine relationships of the following categories:

- preferred competencies and gender of child,
- preferred competencies and age of child,
- preferred competencies and social status of family,
- preferred competencies and Roma ethnic subgroup,
- preferred competencies and education of parents.

Findings

There are 161 and 160 items in the questionnaires 1 (ACRB - boys) and the questionnaire 2 (ACRG - girls) respectively. Adaptive competencies representing the items of ACRB and ACRG were grouped and divided into 8 item subgroups with the following draft titles:

1. Work
2. Health, Self-Care, Caring for Others
3. Social Skills
4. Cognitive Skills
5. Musical, Locomotive and Motor Abilities
6. Money and Survival
7. Religion
8. Socio-pathological Manifestations.

Table 1. Structure of ACRB and ACRG

Domain (surface attributes)	Number of items ACRB	Number of items ACRG
Musical, Locomotive and Motor abilities	17	17
Cognitive Skills	22	25
Religion	4	4
Working Skills	77	66
Social Skills	6	7
Socio-pathological Manifestations	7	9
Health, Self-care, Caring for Others	9	19
Money and Survival	19	20

The domains in both questionnaires were subjected to factor analyses in STATISTIKA 7.0 and SPSS 16 software. Applying the method of principal component analysis with subsequent varimax rotation, factors within particular domains were extracted.

The emphasis within this report will be put on the analysis of the data concerning separate evaluation of boys' and girls' competencies within the two of the questionnaires' domains:

- Money and Survival
- Health, Self-care, Caring for Others

Money and Survival (Roma Girls)

Factor analysis of the given domain indicated a two-factor structure representing 50,234 % of variance. The two generated factors were named:

1. *Selling*
2. *Other Means of Subsistence*.

Factor 1 - *Selling* - seems to be affecting the following items from the battery of surface attributes within the given domain:

Selling meat

Selling products collected or picked by themselves (mushrooms, blueberries)

Selling products made by themselves

Selling products – accompanying mother and father

Selling products – girls of this age group perform it by themselves.

Factor 2 - *Other Means of Subsistence* - is affecting the following items from the list of girls' adaptive competences:

Girl is able to pick food for animals in dumpster

Girl is able to find good clothing in dumpster.

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix(a) Money and Survival Girls

Surface attribute	Factor 1 load	Factor 2 load
Does she go selling meat?	,919	
Did she sell the fruits collected or picked by herself? (mushrooms, blueberries)	,912	
Does she go to sell the fruits?	,897	
Did she sell something independently?	,896	
Does she go selling products – accompanying mother?	,884	
Has she ever sold anything she made by herself?	,672	
Does she pick fruits or nuts from trees?	,452	
Can she find food for animals in dumpster?		,893
Can she find good clothing in dumpster?		,843

Money and Survival (Roma Boys)

Also in the category of Roma boys aged 6 – 10, a two-factor structure was extracted representing 52,238 % of variance. The two factors generated were named:

1. *Ability to Earn Money Independently* (without assistance of adult and without performing socio-pathological activities from the non Roma majority point of view) and ,
2. *Other Means of Subsistence* (without assistance provided by adult but performing some socio-pathological activities, as viewed by non Roma majority).

Factor 1 - *Ability to Earn Money Independently* - has a significant load on the following questionnaire items:

Boy can sell anything without assistance provided by adult
Boy sells things he collected or picked by himself (waste paper, scrape, fruits)
Boy sells fish he caught himself
Boy can sell products he made or bough beforehand
Boy can earn money by playing card games.

Factor 2 - *Other Means of Subsistence* - (without assistance provided by adult but performing some socio-pathological activities, as viewed by non Roma majority) has a significant load on the following questionnaire items:

Boy hunts for birds (pigeons, sparrows) to be cooked and eaten
Boy can find good clothing and food for animals in dumpster
Boy can sell things that were stolen by himself.

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix^a Money and Survival Boys

Surface attribute	Factor 1 load	Factor 2 load
Has he ever sold anything without adult assisting him?	,803	
Has he ever sold things collected by himself?	,711	
Has he ever sold things he bought beforehand?	,694	
Does he collect wastepaper for scrapyard?	,665	
Does he pick fruits or nuts from trees?	,648	
Does ho go selling fruits?	,609	
Does he collect scrape metal?	,607	
Does he go fishing?	,583	
Has he ever sold things he made himself?	,574	
Does he gamble with cards?	,574	
Has he earned his own money?	,569	
Does he hunt birds (pigeons, sparrows) for cooking and eating?		,877
Can he find good clothing in dumpster?		,870
Can he find food for animals in dumpster?		,826
Has he ever sold anything he had stolen before?		,750
Does he go selling other things?		,496

Health, Self-care and Caring for Others (Roma girls)

In this domain, a three-dimensional structure of internal attributes was generated for the girls aged 6 – 10. The three-factor solution represents 62,804 % of variance. The factors were named as follows:

1. *Caring for Younger Siblings*
2. *Caring for Sick*
3. *Personal Hygiene*.

Factor 1 *Caring for Younger Siblings*, indicates that Roma girl aged 6 – 10 is able to:

Dress younger sibling
Feed him/her
Change the baby
Provide treatment when he/she is ill
Wash him/her
Prepare a snack or refreshment.

Within Factor 2 (*Caring for Sick*) Roma girls perform the following:

Can reduce patient's temperature
Can assist in relieving stomach-ache, diarrhoea and vomiting
Can dress wound
Give a rub to painful part of body
Can care for them when being ill – take medicine.

Factor 3 (*Personal Hygiene*) seems to have load on the following competences:

Girl washes her body every day
Girl can wash her hair herself
Girl uses toothbrush.

Table 4 Rotated Component Matrix^a Health, Self-care and Caring for Others (Roma girls)

Surface attribute	Factor 1 Load	Factor 2 load	Factor 3 load
Does she dress younger siblings?	,915		
Does she feed younger siblings?	,890		
Does she change younger babies?	,797		
Does she care for younger sibling when he/she is ill?	,797		
Does she wash younger siblings?	,774		
Does she prepare snack or refreshment to younger siblings?	,722		
Can she reduce patient's temperature?		,882	
Can she assist in vomiting?		,829	
Can she assist in relieving stomach-ache and diarrhoea?		,778	
Can she dress wound?		,701	
Does she treat wounds of family members?		,678	
Does she rub painful parts of body?		,607	
Does she use medicine when alone (and ill)?		,448	
Does she wash her body every day?			,871
Does she wash her hair herself?			,740
Does she use toothbrush every day?			,640
Can she treat burns?			

Health, Self-care and Caring for Others (Roma boys)

Analogously, in the category of Roma boys aged 6 – 10 a three-dimensional structure was extracted. The three-factor solution represented 58,055 % variance. The factors were named as follows:

1. *Caring for Self*
2. *Caring for Sick*
3. *Caring for Younger Siblings*

Factor 1 (*Caring for Self*) feeds the variance in the following competences of Roma boy:

Washes his body himself
Washes his hair himself
Uses toothbrush
Uses medicine himself when ill.

Factor 2 (*Caring for Sick*) has loading only on two items:

Assisting in relieving stomach-ache, and
Rubbing painful parts of body.

Factor 3 (*Caring for Younger Siblings*) is reduced to having two attributes:

Ability to care for younger when they are ill, and
Ability to wash them.

Table 5 Rotated Component Matrix^a Health, Self-care and Caring for Others (Roma boys)

Surface attribute	Factor 1 load	Factor 2 load	Factor 3 load
Does he wash his body every day?	,799		
Does he wash his hair himself?	,744		
Does he use medicine when being ill?	,721		
Does she use toothbrush every day?	,540		
Does he wash his clothing?			
Can he assist in relieving stomach-ache?		,838	
Does he rub painful parts of body?		,706	
Is he capable of caring for younger sibling when s/he is ill?			,851
Does he wash younger siblings?			,717

Weak representation of factors 2 and 3 in surface attributes (only 2 within each factor) suggests the possibility to interpret results the following way. Adaptive competences of Roma boys in the domain of *Health, Self-care and Caring for Others* are reduced to self-caring competences connected with personal hygiene, while caring for other family members is reserved for girls. In conformity with cultural specifics of Roma ethnicity, the activities related to caring for sick family members are attributed as “exclusively female” duties.

Conclusion

According to Berry (2004) exploration of cultural factors focuses mainly on researching variations between communities, manifested in deferring cognitive processes, interpersonal communication and behavioural patterns, accepted values and morals,

attitudes, prejudices etc. The research results have brought the information about adaptive skills of Romany children expected from them culturally. The structure of those competencies is really distant from the required competencies that are evident in majority families. The main purpose of such exploration is in identification and description of the existing cultural phenomena and including them to the explanation of human groups (Roma ethnic). The facts concerning the differences between cultural or ethnic groups gained in the course of cross-cultural research are instrumental in tackling some of the most urgent problems of human co-existence and co-operation.

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