



Addressing the rights of Roma children for a language assessment

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Background

- ◆ Almost universally, policy documents emphasize the essential role of Romani as a mother tongue. Yet there is no assessment in the mother tongue – Romani - for Roma children entering schools in their country of residence. Roma children are given inappropriate tests in their second language, leading to their overrepresentation in special education.
- ◆ Intergovernmental organizations like the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and OSCE, along with non-governmental organizations like ERRC, OSI, ERIO, have voiced support for preschool education for Roma children in Europe.
- ◆ It is vitally important not to use translations of standardized tests given that Romani is a derivative of completely different language stock, closer to Hindi.

Goal of the study

- ◆ The goal was to find item sets for linguistic concepts in Romani likely to be acquired between the ages of three and six, to allow the eventual determination of norms across Romani speakers, with attention to the dialect variations especially in morphology.

Participants

- ◆ 30 typically developing Roma children aged 3-6 were tested on 9 different subtests. Their home in Bulgaria is on the map



Method

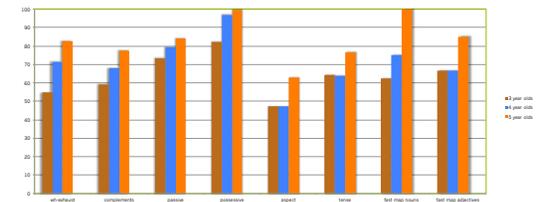
All children were tested in preschools by a native Romani speaker. Stimuli were presented in colorful pictures in a fixed order for tests and stimuli across children.

Test Design

The tests consisted of the following, for a total of 80 items:
Comprehension tests: paired wh, long distance wh, passives,
Process: fast mapping of nouns and adjectives and novel verbs with aspect

Exhaustive Wh questions	Kon so si ko šoro? who what have-3sg. on head Who is wearing what?	
Wh long distance	The mother said/told her son to get her a big pot, but he got her a big glass instead What did the mother say/tell her son to get?	
Passives	O dad sines čhumindo o čhiyatar The father was kiss-3sg Past.I. The girl – Ablative The father was kissed by the girl	
Fast mapping nouns, with gender cues	Look here is a black(m) nepo. Show me a black(m) nepo.	
Fast mapping adjectives, with gender cues	Look what we have here: a donkey, a cat and a dog This color is patravali Where is patravali- m.....(the novel pattern and m=dog)	
Using aspect on novel verbs	Žikate o čho bešela paš I jag o phal kretindas /kretinelas opral lenatar. while the boy was sitting at the fire his brother x-ed/was x-ing the river	
Romani possessives bidirectional gender agreement	Kaka(o bokoskori suki) this (the boho-m.Gen. suki -f Gen) This is boho. He has a suki. Expect: This is...(boho's suki).	
Tense on novel verb	Kaka rom žanna sar te kremenel this man know-3sg how to novelIV. Ič o kerdas sašoto. yesterday he make-PastT. the same Ič o(kremindas) yesterday he.... (novelIV- PastT)	

Results



- ◆ 7 of the 9 subtests proved to be highly correlated with age in months. Figure 1 shows the age growth by tests. Two were less useful: the sentence repetition task was too difficult in this age range and is under revision, and grammatical aspect was quite variable despite mean growth.
- ◆ Some findings echo those in other languages, for example, questions with nonfinite complements were much more readily understood than questions with tensed complements (p<.002).
- ◆ Others are unique to Romani: the possessive morphology, though highly complex, is also systematic and completely mastered by age 4.
- ◆ Even the 3 year olds are well above chance for all comprehension tests (p<.000) and all tests except Aspect reach approximately 80% mastery by age 5.

Conclusion

- ◆ These data show that the children's Romani is a well-established L1 and should be considered an asset and not, as currently, a liability.
- ◆ The assessment is currently being tested across Europe in Roma communities to see how it behaves, with the initial goal of local norming.