

Child-Rearing Attitudes of Roma and Non-Roma Mothers and Analysis of Receptive Language Levels of Their Children

By

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Abstract

This study examines child-rearing attitudes of Roma and non-Roma mothers and their children's receptive language levels. The study based on relational scanning model, which is one of the general screening models, was conducted on 30 Roma and 30 non-Roma mothers and their children at the ages of five and six. Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test were used in the study, while data was assessed by Mann Whitney U-Test as well as Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Test. Study results indicate that in terms of attitude scores of Roma and non-Roma mothers, except from the sub-dimensions of democratic treatment and granting equality, in all other sub-dimensions, there is a significant difference in favor of non-Roma mothers. Similarly, as for the receptive language levels of Roma and non-Roma children, results demonstrate a substantial variance in favor of non-Roma children. Furthermore, it is determined that there is a noteworthy relationship between the sub-dimensions of rigid discipline as well as Roma mother's rejecting their housewifery roles and receptive language developments of Roma children. It is also observed that there is no significant connection between non-Roma mothers' attitudes and receptive language levels of their children.

Keywords: Roma, preschool period, mother's attitude, language development, receptive language development

1. Introduction

The life styles of Roma families, who are among the socially disadvantaged groups, are determined by moral and traditional norms. Women, men, children and elders adopt their roles within the family in accordance with these norms. Roma family structure is based on an extended family structure in which parents, children and grandparents live together. Men in Roma families appropriate their family roles within the framework of moral and traditional standards. Roma men mostly work as musicians, porters, shoe shiners, street vendors and peddlers (Sal, 2009). The status of Roma women within the family is very different from the positions of women in non-Roma communities. In all Roma groups, the status of women remains similar; women lie at the core of family life. On the other hand, Roma women experience double oppression. She not only encounters oppression from non-Roma people but also is exposed to abuse at home by her husband. Despite all these, women are still the guards of the family economy. Besides taking care of domestic work, they also take active roles in providing financially for the family. The studies demonstrate that Roma people have low level of education (Kyuchukov, 2007); Roma women work in order to contribute to the family economy; however, despite their important contributions, they have no say on how the family functions (Posavec and Hrvatic, 2000).

The importance of children is also significant in Roma families. Children are the essence, target and center of Roma's lives, and their functions in the family structure cannot be underestimated. Children of

Roma people, compared to other children, are more enterprising, expressive and self-confident. From the moment they learn to walk, these children gain their independence. Roma children also contribute to family finances (Sal, 2009). They mostly work or are forced to work due to obligations, conditions resulting from poverty, low level of education and problems stemming from customs. According to a study conducted by Akşit, Karancı and Gündüz Hoşgör (2001), it was determined that the average age of the children who work in the streets is 12; %38 of the children either never went to school or dropped out; their work hours are long and irregular, and they come from extended families with low level of education and income. Because of these children's compelling roles within their households, it becomes crucial to study the ways in which they are brought up by their families.

A family's attitude toward child rearing is the most important factor in the development of a child. Parents, intentionally or not, might show different attitudes towards their children. Some children are given more affection and love by their parents, while some are oppressed; some children are considered unwanted, while some are raised in highly tolerant environments. The parent attitudes towards children affect the ways in which children shape and develop their identities. Too much oppression imposed on a child might prevent the child's development of self-esteem and might lead to his being passive, timorous, shy and timid. Moreover, the child might tend to act in aggressive ways. Ambivalent attitudes also hinder a child's self-respect and self-confidence. On the other hand, democratic and supportive attitudes are effective in a child's getting acceptance from family and society (Çağdaş and Seçer Şahin, 2004).

Mothers' approaches to child rearing are influenced by multiple factors such as their own personality traits, the behavioral patterns they learned from their parents, the environment they lived in and their levels of education (Güngör, 2002). Furthermore, studies highlight the importance of a mother's education level, age and socioeconomic status. The structure of the family in which the mother was brought up (a nuclear family, an extended family or a single parent family), the number of children in that family, the mother's own childhood experiences as well as the attitudes and family relations she has observed as a child are also claimed to be influential (Sertelin, 2003; Özyürek, 2004; Özerk, 2006; Şanlı, 2007; Şentürk, 2007; Yaprak, 2007; Türker, 2008; Atalay Yalçın, 2010).

In order to have healthy parent attitudes towards children, parents especially need to be at peace with themselves. It is very important for the family members to express themselves well and communicate. They should also be able to maintain the healthy communication. Parents should be successful, easeful and stable individuals who love and respect each other (Yavuzer, 1996; Akman ve Gülay, 2008). Mothers' child rearing attitudes can influence children's language and socio-emotional development as well as their self-respect and personality traits (Demir, 2006; Şentürk, 2007; Yaprak, 2007; Türker, 2008; Kaya, 2010).

It is necessary to support all aspects of a child's development in the preschool years, which covers many critical periods of development (Demiral, 1989). Language development interacts with other developmental areas and promotes collective progress. Therefore, during the preschool years, which are very critical for language development, it is crucial to create effective teaching and learning environment both in the family and in pedagogical environments. Precautions taken in the preschool period will especially contribute to socially disadvantaged children's language development and also will help to achieve equal opportunity in education (Senemoğlu, 2007). From this perspective, this study seeks to comparatively analyze Roma and non-Roma mothers' attitudes and their five to six-year-old children's receptive language levels, determine if there is a relationship between the mother's attitude and the child's receptive language level, and offer some suggestions drawn from the study results.

2. Method

Structure of the Study

The study, which examines child-rearing attitudes of Roma and non-Roma mothers and their effects on the receptive language levels of five-to six-year-old children, is based on relational scanning model, which is one of the general screening models. The relational scanning models are research models which aim to determine the existence and level of exchange among two or more variables (Karasar, 2005).

The Study Group

The research is carried on with Roma and non-Roma mothers and their five-to six-year-old children who live in Konya, Turkey—more specifically in the YeniMahalle neighborhood in the town of Karatay and in the BosniaHerzegovina neighborhood in the town of Selcuklu. The research was conducted on a volunteer basis. 30 Roma and 30 non-Roma mothers, who share similar sociocultural characteristics according to the town records, were included in the study.

Upon getting consents from their parents, 60 children (30 Roma, 30 non-Roma) in the 5-6 age group are included in the study group. It is determined that among Roma mothers who participated in the study, % 66.7 of the mothers are literate; % 36.6 of the mothers are at the age of 25 or younger; % 76.7 of them have become mothers at the ages of 15-20; % 56.7 of them have one or two children; % 26.7 of them have five or more children and % 96.7 of them do not have fixed incomes. It is also determined that % 96.7 of the non-Roma mothers graduated from elementary school; all of the non-Roma mothers are either 25 years old or older; % 76.7 of them have become mothers at the age of 21 or older; all of them have one or two children and fixed incomes. As for Roma children in the study group, there are 16 girls and 14 boys; whereas 14 of the non-Roma children are boys and 16 of them are girls. None of the children in both groups have any preschool education.

Data Collection

Information regarding mothers and children is collected through Personal Information Form prepared by the researchers. Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) is used to determine attitudes of Roma and non-Roma mothers while Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test is employed to measure children's receptive language developments.

Parental Attitude Research Instrument developed by Bell and Schaefer (1958) was translated into Turkish by LeCompte, LeCompte and Özer (1978). It is determined that the scale's test-retest correlations are between .55 and .88; and Cronbach alpha coefficients (internal consistency) are .64. Due to low Cronbach alpha coefficients, among the 115 items of the scale, 60 items with high reliability and clear factor loadings are re-selected, and Cronbach alpha coefficients are measured again. This time, Cronbach alpha coefficients are determined as .81. The 60-item-scale is composed of five sub-dimensions which are overprotective mothering (16 items), democratic treatment and granting equality (9 items), rejecting housewifery role (13 items), incompatibility (6 items) and rigid discipline (16 items). It is observed that Cronbach alpha coefficients for the five sub-dimensions of the scale vary between .59 and .90. Likert scale is evaluated and scored as: I find it very appropriate (4 points), I find it fairly appropriate (3 points), I find it slightly appropriate (2 points), I don't find it appropriate (1 point). The reversal items in the scale (2, 29, 44) are given reversed scores (qtd in Öner, 2008). The researchers applied the scale individually to the mothers in the study group.

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was designed by Dunn (1959) and was adapted for Turkish by Katz, Önen, Demir, Uzlukeya and Uludağ (1974). The scores of city-children and village-children were compared using the t-test, and it was determined that there is a significant difference at the level of .01 in favor of the city-children (Öner, 2008; Özgüven, 1994). The test was translated into Turkish by seven specialists and the translation was double-checked by experts who have excellent commands of both languages. Then, the test was administered to a small group of children, and as a result of this application, vocabulary and pictures not relevant for the Turkish culture were changed. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test which measures receptive vocabulary development is individually applied to children between ages

2 and 12. In the test, there are 100 cards--each with four pictures. While administering the test, researchers ask the child to point to the picture that corresponds to the word spoken. As for each correct answer, one point is credited. In case six of the final eight questions are wrongly answered, then the test is terminated. The total score makes the raw score of the test (qtd in Öner, 2008). The test was applied to children individually, in a quiet setting, by the researchers, and the data was collected in July 2009.

Data Analysis

As for the data analysis, nonparametric methods were used since the sample group is small, and the standard deviation is high in most of the measured data. Mann Whitney U-Test is employed for the two unrelated samples which are suggested as alternative tests in the cases when assumptions of normality are not met for parametric statistics (Büyüköztürk, 2008).

Mann Whitney U-Test, which is a non-parametric method, is used to determine whether or not there is a significant difference between Roma and non-Roma mothers’ attitudes and Roma and non-Roma children’s receptive language levels. On the other hand, to find the relationship between Roma and non-Roma mothers’ attitudes and children’s receptive language scores, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test is used. The significance level is set as 0.05, and values under this level are considered significant.

3. Findings and Discussion

The results obtained from the study, conducted with the aim of comparing mothers’ attitudes and five-to six-year-old children’s receptive language levels, are presented in tables and discussed.

Table 1. Results of Mann Whitney U-test Regarding Roma & non-Roma Mothers’ Attitude Scores

Mother Attitude	Being Roma or non-Roma	N	\bar{X}	S	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Overprotective Mothering	Roma	30	61.36	2.77	44.47	1334.00	31.00	.000*
	Non-Roma	30	48.13	6.32	16.53	496.50		
Democratic Treatment and Granting Equality	Roma	30	26.33	3.25	33.50	1005.00	360.00	.180
	Non-Roma	30	25.23	3.69	27.50	825.00		
Rejecting Housewifery Role	Roma	30	44.66	6.13	43.10	1293.00	72.00	.000*
	Non-Roma	30	31.53	6.82	17.90	537.00		
Incompatibility	Roma	30	22.20	2.15	42.30	1269.00	96.00	.000*
	Non-Roma	30	16.13	3.94	18.70	561.00		
Rigid Discipline	Roma	30	54.63	6.08	39.40	1182.00	183.00	.000*
	Non-Roma	30	47.10	7.02	21.60	648.00		

Significance is searched at the level of p<.05.

As seen in Table 1, in terms of Roma and non-Roma Mothers’ attitude scores, except from the sub-dimensions of democratic treatment and granting equality, in all other sub-dimensions as well as in total scores, there is a significant difference (p<.05). When mean ranks are considered, it is observed that

Roma mothers, compared to non-Roma mothers, do more overprotective mothering and impose rigid discipline on their children. These mothers are incompatible, and they reject housewifery roles. In her study, Özyürek (2004) determined that, attitudes of parents living in rural areas and residing in the city centers significantly differ. It is observed that parents in rural parts embrace more protective and stricter discipline attitudes than parents in urban areas. However, democratic treatment did not show any variance according to the allocation unit.

In another study conducted by the Konya Police Department (2005), it is determined that children of Roma families in Konya, who are in the risk group, work in the streets selling tissues, weighing people or cleaning cars' windshields rather than attending school. % 55 of these children are in the 12-15 age group; % 24 of them are between the ages 0 and 11, while % 21 of them are between 16 and 18. According to the study, among the child street vendors in Konya, %10 of the children have never gone to a school; % 2 of them are literate; %5 of the children are school dropouts; % 2 of them graduated from elementary school, and % 8 of them are high school students (http://www.konya.pol.tr/cocuk/72.htm#_Toc123117042). In his study, Yolcuoğlu (2010) stated that parents' individual characteristics, depression and anxiety, low tolerance, low self-esteem, weak attachment with their own parents, family conflicts and lack of social support are affecting children's being subject to abuse and neglect.

It can be stated that as the men in Roma families do not participate much in the family life and share responsibilities for the children, Roma mothers direct all their love and affection to their children. This, then, leads to mothers' being overprotective or too strict towards their children, and their showing incompatibility and noncompliance with their housewifery roles. The reason why Roma mothers demonstrate these particular behaviors is their life struggles: the fact that their partners leave their homes temporarily (for reasons such as employment, health-care, imprisonment, etc.), the fact that most of the Roma women become mothers at early ages (%76.7) and have many children (%26.7), the fact that they do not have fixed incomes (%96.7), and the fact that they take responsibilities for children and home by themselves alone.

Table 2. Results of Mann Whitney U-Test Regarding Roma and non-Roma Children's Receptive Language Scores

	Being Roma or non-Roma	n	\bar{X}	S	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Receptive Language Level	Roma	30	38.10	12.68	16.53	496.00	31.00	.000*
	Non-Roma	30	66.56	6.68	44.47	1334.00		

Significance is searched at the level of $p < .05$.

Table 2 indicates that there is a significant difference in favor of non-Roma children regarding the receptive language levels of Roma and non-Roma children ($p < .05$). According to this result, receptive language level of non-Roma children is higher than the Roma children. The fact that Roma families cannot meet their fundamental needs due to their low socioeconomic status incites their children's dissatisfaction with life. Reflection of this problem to family relations can be aggressiveness, nervousness, instability and uneasiness. Lack of a rich, stimulating environment in which children from low socioeconomic levels can experiment with language, also both low vocabulary knowledge of Roma families and absence of a role model who can proficiently use the language, and finally insufficiency of children's oral communications result in Roma children's falling behind in their language development (Özyürek, 2004; Erdoğan, Şimşek Bekir and Erdoğan Aras, 2005).

In families with low socioeconomic status, parents' showing insufficient interests in their children and providing very limited learning opportunities for them negatively influence children's developments.

Ülgen and Fidan (1991) state that in families from high socioeconomic levels children speak early and fluently. Language is acquired through a child's active social interaction with people around him. Therefore, mothers' speech characteristics and quality time they spend with their children are closely related to children's language abilities in the early childhood period (Erdoğan et al., 2005). To support a child's language development, the family needs to provide appropriate stimulating environment (Demir, 2006). Vocabulary development of a child is not only associated with the family and the immediate environment but also related to cultural opportunities as well as rich and stimulating environment offered to child (Erdoğan et al., 2005).

As stated by Owens (2005), parents need to be good role models for their children in terms of language development and they should promote children's talk in the most appropriate environment. Because language is a social tool with complex symbols which need to be used in a proper order, encouraging children to talk and give responses affects their language skills positively. The reason for Roma children's insufficient receptive language development could be that they do not have qualified role models in terms of language skills, and most of the Roma families are illiterate (%66.7). Child-rearing methods are developed as a consequence of cultural accumulation and are considered to be a part of the cultural system which is transferred from generation to generation to meet the environmental needs (Sertelin, 2003). In the light of this information, causes of the difference between Roma and non-Roma children's language developments can be explained as: mothers' low level of education (%66.7 of the Roma mothers are literate), poverty and the families' not living on fixed incomes (%96.7), early motherhood (%76.7) and having many children (%26.7), problems arising from traditional culture and the negative life circumstances they bring. Moreover, Roma children are seen as a major disadvantage at schools, and thus the Roma children attending schools are socially marginalized on campuses. It can be claimed that this also negatively affects children's language developments (McDonald, 1999; Kyuchukov, 2000).

In the country reports of European Roma Rights Center (2008), it is highlighted that in Turkey there are various obstacles in front of Roma children's having access to quality education. It is stated that the major impediment to Roma children's successful participation in education is their obligations to work in order to contribute to family economies. Also included in the reports is the information that Roma are marginalized from education and economy; they are discriminated in health care services and social security systems; they have difficulties in accessing personal documents, they are marginalized from public works and their settlements are destroyed (European Roma Rights Center Country Reports Series, 2008).

The degree of Roma's integration into Turkish social life is primarily related to their education levels. Breakdowns on this level have negative reflections on Turkish society and Roma, both individually and societally. Children are the most affected ones by the widespread discrimination against Roma, and thus Roma children are in the risk group (<http://www.unicef.org/turkey/pc/ge17.html>). Igarashi (2005) stated that Roma children, as children at-risk, have been the subject matter of numerous studies. Igarashi also emphasized that in order have effective results from the support programs designed for Roma children (in terms of motivation, language skills, self-confidence, identity, family attitude and academic success) curriculum and education methods need to be altered.

Studies demonstrate that socioeconomic level (Erkan, 1990; Bagby, Rudd, and Woods, 2004; Taner and Başal, 2005; İpek, 2006) and mother's education level (Öztürk, 1995; Demir, 2006) affect language development. Furthermore, in a study by Şişman (2006), it is determined that children who work in the streets come from families with low socioeconomic status; they sell food or other goods and work for the whole year and after school; they meet their daily food needs in the streets; they live with their families and do not have bad habits. On the other hand, in his study, Bilgin (2009) determined that children who work in the streets are subject to sexual, physical and emotional violence, and gradually they also become

prone to crime. He also highlighted that the children work in environments open to exploitation and abuse; they do not really benefit from nutrition, health care and education opportunities, and despite their miserable working conditions, most of the time they have very small earnings. Moreover, the fact that children do not benefit from preschool education also brings disadvantages. In her study, Yıldırım (2008) found out that parents' education level, number of children, birth order, family's income level and age factors are determining the language development of children who do not attend preschool educational institutions. Moreover, Kotaman (2008) pointed out that parent involvement highly affects children's academic achievements, and parents from high education levels involve more with their children's education. It can be said that Roma children's language developments are negatively affected as a result of their families' socioeconomic and education levels, families' having children at early ages, as well as due to problems arising from traditional culture and negative environmental conditions.

Table 3. Results of Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test Regarding the Relationship between Roma and non-Roma Mothers' Attitudes and Children's Receptive Language Scores

Mother Attitude Sub-dimensions		Children's Receptive Roma	Language Levels Non-Roma
Overprotective Mothering	Pearson Correlation	.188	.034
	P	.319	.860
	N	30	30
Democratic Treatment and Granting Equality	Pearson Correlation	.233	.010
	P	.215	.959
	N	30	30
Rejecting Housewifery Role	Pearson Correlation	.474	.116
	P	.008	.543
	N	30	30
Incompatibility	Pearson Correlation	.168	.013
	P	.374	.947
	N	30	30
Rigid Discipline	Pearson Correlation	.494	.064
	P	.006	.735
	N	30	30

Table 3 indicates that there is not a significant relationship between the sub-dimensions of Roma mothers' overprotective mothering, incompatibility, democratic treatment and granting equality and Roma children's receptive language developments. On the other hand, it is observed that the relationship is significant when it comes to the sub-dimensions of rejecting housewifery roles and rigid discipline and Roma children's receptive language developments. As a result of the findings, it can be claimed that mothers' rejecting their housewifery roles and imposing rigid discipline on their children positively affect their children's receptive language developments.

It is known that position of women in Roma families is very different from women's position in non-Roma families. Roma women take important responsibilities in providing financially for the family in addition to handling domestic work. Many studies demonstrate that Roma women work in order to contribute to the family economy; however, they still have no say on how the family functions (Kyuchukov, 2007; Posavec and Hrvatic, 2000; Sal, 2009). The fact that Roma women work and support the family might boost their self-confidence. Similarly, mother's high self-esteem might increase the child's self-confidence, which might then positively affect the child's receptive language development.

To be a working woman in the family might favorably influence a women's morale and life satisfaction. According to Greenberger and Goldberg (1989), to be working parents is one of the most important factors that affect parenting styles. In a study conducted by Hoffman (1988), parenting attitudes of housewife mothers and working mothers are analyzed, and it is determined that working mothers are more effective mothers. On the other hand, children are the essence, target and center of Roma families. Because of the fact that children have very important roles in the family, when compared to their peers, Roma children seem to be more enterprising, expressive and self-confident (Sal, 2009). This, of course, contributes to their developments in favorable ways. The child's self-esteem, regardless of the rigid discipline, might positively contribute to his language development.

It is determined that in all sub-dimensions there is not a significant relationship between non-Roma mothers' attitudes and their children's receptive language levels. Children affect parents' attitudes, and parents' attitudes influence children's developments (Arı, Bayhan and Artan, 1997). Families are instrumental in language development which is the source of communication (Cüceloğlu, 1997). It is observed that in families, children's talk is not supported with awareness. Because taking responsibility for language development is not common in all cultures, adults can use a simplified version of their own languages to assist children in their language acquisitions (Lund, 2003) as children start to gain their language skills immediately after birth (Cüceloğlu, 1997).

Low sociocultural characteristics of both Roma and non-Roma families give us pause to think that mothers' attitudes are not important for assisting a child's language development. Except from mother's attitude, other factors such as social and stimulating environments might also influence language development (Karacan, 2000; Pilancı, 2009).

4. Results and Suggestions

Study results indicate that in terms of attitude scores of Roma and non-Roma mothers, except from the sub-dimensions of democratic treatment and granting equality, in all other sub-dimensions, there is a significant difference in favor of non-Roma mothers. Similarly, as for the receptive language levels of Roma and non-Roma children, results demonstrate a substantial variance in favor of non-Roma children. Furthermore, it is determined that there is not a significant relationship between the sub-dimensions of Roma mothers' overprotective mothering, incompatibility, democratic treatment and granting equality and Roma children's receptive language developments. On the other hand, it is observed that the relationship is significant when it comes to the sub-dimensions of rejecting housewifery roles and rigid discipline and receptive language developments of Roma children. It is also observed that, in all sub-dimensions, there is not a significant relationship between non-Roma mothers' attitudes and receptive language levels of their children. In accordance with these results,

- offering education programs on child development and more specifically on language development and parent attitudes to Roma families in their own neighborhoods, and encouraging families' participation in the program,
- providing Roma children with rich and stimulating gaming and educational environments in order to achieve equal opportunity in education,
- training teachers and school administrators (and especially the ones working in the schools around the areas Roma families live) regarding Roma traditional culture in order to promote school attendance, and thus making schools more attractive for Roma children and families,
- building an infrastructure to resolve the problems of at-risk social groups such as Roma families, and developing and maintaining this system can be suggested.

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