

**Zita Réger**  
**Department of Applied linguistics**

**Present activities:** 1986- Senior research fellow at the Research Institute of Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest

**Past activities:** 1978- Research Fellow at the Research Institute of Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest

**Education:**

- B.A. in Latin, Greek and French, Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest 1969.
- M.A. in General Linguistics, 1975
- Candidate (Ph.D.) in Linguistics, 1986.

**Other Professional experience:**

- Summer 1974: Summer Course of Sociolinguistics, University of Diepenbeek, Belgium
- Spring 1978: Scholarship at the Linguistic Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Moscow
- 1979-82: Research Associate in the National Centre of Nursery Pedagogy, Budapest
- Autumn 1983: Research Scholar in Residence, Paris, C.N.R.S.
- Spring 1984: Visiting Scholar, Boston University, Department of Psychology
- Summer 1986: Research Scholar in Residence, Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris
- 1990: Chief Organizer of the Fifth International Congress for the Study of Child Language (15-20 July, Budapest)
- Spring 1990, 1991: Research Scholar in Residence, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Wien
- Spring 1992: Visiting Scholar, Reading University, Department of Linguistics (under the TEMPUS scheme)
- Spring 1994: Visiting Scholar, Reading University, Department of Linguistics (under the TEMPUS scheme)
- Summer term, 1991: Course given at the University of Vienna ('Language and Socialization')

**Professional societies:**

- Executive Committee, International Association for the Study of Child Language
- Gypsy Lore Society
- Linguistic Committee of the National Postgraduate Degree Granting Board (TMB)

**Editorial Work:** Acta Linguistica, Editorial Board, 1991-

**Grants and fellowships**

- Postdoctoral Fellowship, Hungarian Academy of Sciences 1975-78:

Research grants:

- National Foundation for Scientific Research (OTKA): 'Problems of Linguistic Socialization in Bilingual and Monolingual Gypsy Communities in Hungary' 1986, 1987-91  
'Psycholinguistic Research on Hungarian Database', 1991-94
- Soros Foundation: 1990-91: Disadvantaged Social Background and Language Development
- Soros Roma Foundation (Zürich): 1995: Gypsy Children's World.
- Soros Roma Program: 1996 Linguistic Socialization of Gypsy Children.

**Grant application committee membership:**

Linguistic Committee of the National Foundation for Scientific Research (OTKA), 1992-94

## International cooperation:

- 1991 - TEMPUS: 'Language, Cognitive Science and Informational Technology' (with the University of Groningen, and University of Reading, among others)
- Joint research with Jean Berko Gleason (professor in the Psychology Department of Boston University) (cf. the relevant bibliographical item)

## Selected bibliography

- 1978 Bilingual Gypsy children in Hungary: Explorations in the "natural" acquisition of a second language. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 19, 59-82.
- 1986 The functions of imitation in child language. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 7, 323-352.
- 1987 Nyelvi szocializáció és nyelvhasználat a magyarországi cigány nyelvi közösségekben. (Linguistic socialization and language use among Romani-speaking Gypsies in Hungary.) *Műhelymunkák a nyelvészet és társtudományai köréből*, 3, 31-89.
- 1988 Language groups among the Gypsies and some aspects of their oral culture. In: *The less widely taught languages of Europe*. IRAAL (Irish Association for Applied Linguistics), Dublin, 111-131.
- 1990 Mothers' speech in different social groups in Hungary. In: Gina Conti-Ramsden és Catherine E. Snow (szerk.): *Children's Language 7*. Erlbaum Ass., Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1990, 197-222.
- 1990 Utak a nyelvhez. Nyelvi szocializáció, nyelvi hátrány. (Routes to language. Linguistic socialization, linguistic disadvantage.) Akadémiai K. Budapest,
- 1991 - and Jean Berko Gleason: Romani child-directed speech and children's language among Gypsies in Hungary. *Language in Society*, 20, 601-617.
- 1991 Socialisation des enfants et pratique linguistique. *Cahier de Littérature Orale*, no 30, 99-114.
- 1995 The language of Gypsies in Hungary: an overview of research. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 111, 79-91.
- 1995 [co-edited with Keith E. Nelson] *Children's Language 8*, New Jersey, Erlbaum
- 1997 Teasing in the linguistic socialization of Gypsy children in Hungary. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, in press.

## Research Interest

- Linguistic socialization in different cultures
- Child language development
- Early discourse development
- Discourse and narratives
- Linguistic socialization and education

## Current research project: Linguistic Socialization of Romani Speaking Children Living in Traditional Gypsy Communities

The project aims at describing the basic interaction patterns and ways of speaking children are socialized to in Romani speaking traditional Gypsy communities. The initial hypothesis is that these ways of speaking are culturally defined, and that there is a cultural conflict - leading to these children's massive failure at school - between these culturally defined ways of speaking and those required in formal education.

Research has focused on two main points in the generational transmission of language and culture:

- (i) Child directed speech and adult-child interaction with babies and children in relation to the oral culture of the community;
- (ii) Transmission of culture within children's group. Child discourse; games, play and narratives in preschool groups and at later ages.

Research is based on 160 hours of audio and video recordings gathered in 13 traditional settlements (77 households) of which 60 hours have been transcribed up to now. These data have been complemented by the longitudinal video recording of one girl, whose language development has been followed longitudinally from 0;9 to 7;0.

With respect to topic (i), it has been demonstrated that, many of the modifications found in the Child Directed Speech register of other languages are commonly found in the speech directed to children acquiring Romani as well. In addition, child directed speech in these communities seems to be deeply influenced by living ethnographic traditions and properties of oral culture. In addition to dialogic improvisation performed to babies and the extensive use of test

questions with toddlers and older children (see Réger and Gleason, 1991), teasing seemed to be particularly important in adult-child interaction from the earliest age. A specific feature of teasing babies in Gypsy communities is the direct modelling of teasing sequences, an adult or older child providing adequate responses on the baby's behalf. The range of topics and structural and pragmatic characteristics of teasing, as well as changes in these patterns occurring as a function of the child's age and growing linguistic abilities, are being analyzed (see Réger, in press). As to the acquisition of this discourse skill, Gypsy children seem to recognize and use very early some of the specific "contextualization cues" necessary for the identification of the underlying intention of teasing behind the surface form.

As to topic (ii), i.e. child discourse, texts collected in one settlement, a city in North-East Hungary, have been selected for analysis. From 30 hours of audio- and video recordings made among 5 to 16-year old Romani speaking children in this settlement, 12 hours of texts have been transcribed and analyzed in order to identify culture-specific discourse types or "genres". Genres can be distinguished on the basis of topic, as well as on that of some prominent structural and pragmatic characteristics of the texts themselves, and typical features of their performance. Several culturally specific narrative and conversational genres have been identified. These "genres" significantly differed in their degree of formality, marked by a number of prosodic, phonological, lexical and discourse features. Part of these "genres" seemed to be transmitted within the children's community without adult interference. Each of these preliminarily defined "genres" could be related either to "vorba" ('formal speech') and "duma" ('everyday speech'), the two culturally specific, and locally designated ways of speaking in Wallachian Gypsy communities (see Stewart, 1997).

Research on the linguistic socialization of Gypsy children seems to demonstrate that child directed speech transmits, from a very early age, linguistic devices that are integral part of the oral culture of Gypsy communities. Early introduction of children into these ways of speaking reflects the importance of these socially appropriate modes of expressions for Gypsy culture and Gypsy identity.

The study of child discourse has revealed that, already at preschool age, children in traditional Gypsy communities may be highly competent in a number of culturally defined discourse types or genres. These ways of speaking, however, are not the ones that are required, valued, or even known about in the school Gypsy children attend. In addition to this factor, the early experiences of these children do not include even minor elements of preliteracy training. These facts together may largely contribute to their lack of success in attaining literacy.

#### References:

- For Réger and Gleason, 1991 and Réger, in press see the relevant items in the selected bibliography above;
- Stewart, Michael, 1997: *The time of the Gypsies*. West View Press, Boulder-Oxford.