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Roman Numerals in Teaching and Grammar and Orthography Handbooks of the Serbian Language

Extended summary

The orthographic norm specifies that Roman numerals (numbers) are used to denote ordinal numbers and represent a semantic equivalent to Arabic numerals with a full-stop, or ordinal numbers, as a numerical type. Therefore, while Arabic numerals require a full-stop to denote an ordinal number (12. = twelfth; 12= twelve), with Roman numerals the full-stop is not written (for example, XLVI FEST = 46 FEST). Bearing this in mind, the authors highlighted the importance of Roman numerals in the system of numerical types in the relevant orthography and grammar handbooks (from Belić's and Matica's orthography handbooks to *Normative Grammar*) and offered solutions that would regulate their normative status and place in the orthography and grammar of the Serbian Language. Our content analysis included orthography handbooks, from Belić's handbook from 1923 up until the most recent handbooks published by Matica Srpska, by Milorad Dešić and Radoje Simić, grammar textbooks for primary schools from the fourth until the eighth grade, approved for use in education by the relevant ministry. The paper also analyzes the results obtained from the candidates at the entrance exam at the Teacher Education Faculty in Belgrade in 2017 on the tasks related to the knowledge of Roman numerals. The sample consisted of 386 candidates from both departments. The main tasks of the research were: (1) the analysis of the representation of numbers (digits) as semantic equivalents of cardinal and ordinal numbers expressed through words in orthography and grammar handbooks of the Serbian language; (2) to determine whether orthographic and grammatical literature points out the different uses of these number units; (3) to determine how familiar graduated high-school students are with Roman numerals. The research was conducted using a descriptive method. We applied a content analysis technique, and a documentation analysis

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protocol for collecting data. The research should demonstrate how sufficient the knowledge that pupils acquire in orthography classes is when it comes to clearly distinguishing the functional marking of Roman numerals (on one hand, as linguistic, and on the other, as mathematical symbols). The candidates' scores on the entrance exam tasks dealing with Roman numerals have also started a discussion on their role in teaching practice. Textbooks sometimes contain instructions stating that in written discourse, numerical words must always be used instead of digits, even though modules dealing with numerical types specifically list numbers used to replace numerical words. This is where Roman numerals can be found, in a sadly reduced capacity, as just one option for denoting ordinal numbers (next to the words and Arabic numerals with full-stops). Even though Serbian Language curricula emphasize the pursuit of pupils' functional knowledge at all levels in the domain of language and orthography, textbook and orthography handbook analysis has shown that, when it comes to numbers, teaching materials dealing with numbers are overwhelmingly concerned with numerical words, while the numeral equivalents (be they Arabic or Roman) are not even mentioned. This omission is further confirmed by the previously mentioned scores – and not only the scores regarding Roman numerals, but ordinal numbers expressed through Arabic numerals as well. In pupils' minds, no single system of denoting precise amounts and rank (order) is established, the one in which numerical words and numerals are equal, and therefore where numbers (digits) can be language units (not in a real sense, of course), when used in a sentence. This is why it is necessary to include numerals – both Arabic and Roman – as semantic equivalents. This would also mean that classes in orthography should insist on the situational marking of numbers when functioning as cardinal and ordinal numbers. This is the only way in which knowledge acquired at orthography classes will be enough for clearly distinguishing the functional marking of the Roman numerals (on one hand, as linguistic, and on the other, as mathematical symbols).

Keywords: Serbian Language, orthography, numerical type, ordinal number, digit.

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