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Speech Culture in Serbian Language Instruction

Extended summary

In the modern era, the ability to express oneself orally plays a very important role in communication because it is important to us not only what the interlocutor says, but also how he/she says it. In order to perfect our speech, it is necessary to possess enviable speaking skills. We can achieve this by developing and cultivating speech culture, which is not a short-term process, but something that we learn and improve almost throughout our lives. As in many other cases, education plays a crucial role in this process and this is why the paper examines the position of teaching speech culture in the lower grades of elementary school. The curriculum for the subject Serbian language includes three areas - literature, language (grammar and spelling) and speech culture. Given that within the framework of speech culture certain teaching contents have the acquisition and nurturing of speech culture as their main goal, the main aim of this paper was to investigate how much this area is represented in the current grammar textbooks for elementary school. It was therefore necessary to establish when students first encounter materials related to speech culture, how this area is covered in grammar workbooks and textbooks for elementary school and how it is approached in classes, i.e., what exercises and tasks improve pupils' communication skills in terms of speech culture. The research involved an analysis of the current Serbian language textbooks for the lower grades of elementary school, including a selection of teaching units, exercises, and tasks related to speech culture, which implies correct pronunciation of sounds, accent, and intonation. We were interested in the extent to which these areas are covered, considering the fact that phonetics and accentology are covered in older classes, while intonation is completely absent. This poses a serious task for the elementary school teacher - to point out the basics of these areas at a level that will

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be comprehensible and easy for pupils to learn. Although speech culture is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the curriculum, it is incorporated through a number of teaching contents in grammar and literature. That is why, in all four grades, speech exercises most often occur in the teaching units that deal with talking, retelling, describing, reading, reciting, and practicing different communication situations (telephone conversation, conversation with adults, with peers, etc.). At the end of the first cycle of education, pupils are expected to acquire basic knowledge about these aspects of speech culture. The learning outcomes state that a pupil will be able to read the text observing the intonation of the sentence and to clearly and articulately say the informative, interrogative and commanding sentences while observing the appropriate intonation, logical accent, pauses, speed and tempo, which will allow him/her to participate in various communication situations in everyday life. In order to achieve the set outcomes, it is necessary for pupils to work on developing their oral expression skills throughout all four grades of elementary school. The correct pronunciation of sounds is covered to a greater or lesser extent from the first to the fourth grade. Some authors approach this material in more detail, so they insist on the articulation of certain sounds and give tasks to practice their pronunciation, while in some cases not all possibilities of the tasks are used and the focus is more on writing than on pronunciation. Pupils encounter the accent for the first time in the fourth grade, where they are not required to mark the accents, which can be justified by the fact that the material itself is too challenging for the lower grades. However, with proper guidance and well-designed and interesting tasks, especially when it comes to the pronunciation of words in which the accent is a semantic-differential feature, pupils can immanently master the basic knowledge of accentology. Although there is room for this as early as the first grade, some pupils encounter the term intonation only in the third grade, and some, depending on which textbook they use, not even then. Since intonation plays an important role in the constitution of utterances, the basic concepts of intonation could be a part of teaching communicative sentences. By saying one sentence with only a change of intonation, pupils would practice and improve their oral expression.

Speech culture can be successfully developed in children in the lower grades of elementary school with various exercises, especially if we consider the possibilities of new technologies that would allow pupils to hear the correct pronunciation of sounds, words, and sentences. In this way they could adopt correct accent and intonation models more easily. During reading, speaking, or any other form of oral expression, teachers can influence the good quality of the prosodic structure of the utterance. However, we believe that this is not enough. Speech culture should be developed through various oral exercises, and this can only be done if more space is given to it in the curriculum and textbooks.

Keywords: grammar, Serbian language instruction, speech culture, pronunciation, accent, intonation

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