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Local Speech of Elementary Students from Vranje and Serbian Language Grammar Teaching

Extended summary

The adoption of the language standard in Prizren-Timok area is hampered by the influence of the local speech and it is achieved with great difficulty. The reason for this can be found in the distinct differences between the dialectal and standard language systems. The key question is how to treat the students' local speech in Serbian language instruction when adopting the language standard. Traditional grammar instruction is based on the mechanical adoption of language rules and on identifying and correcting dialectal features in students' speech which are interpreted as incorrect and undesirable. On the other hand, creative and modern Serbian language instruction starts from the linguistic experience of the students, carefully and creatively comparing their local speech and the standard language.

The local speech of elementary students from Vranje in Serbian grammar instruction is the subject of our research. The aim of the paper is to determine the level of presence of these specific language features in the curricula for Serbian grammar instruction in elementary schools.

The research was conducted in line with the methodology of the current socio-linguistic research and urban dialectology. The material containing almost 50 hours of audio recordings was collected by using an open-interview technique (unstructured interview). The interlocutor conducted the interviews with the interviewees in the local dialect and on topics that they are familiar with. The interview was conducted with 24 students (12 students in grades 1 to 4, and other 12 students in grades 5 to 8) who were born in Vranje and live there just as their parents. They are boys or girls and live in different parts of the town (center and suburbs). The interviews were conducted in two sessions lasting two school hours. Specific language features were

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identified in the transcripts and analyzed – several characteristics at phonetic, morphological, and syntactical levels, typical of the local speech in Vranje and present in the speech of all users of this dialect. Every dialectal feature was statistically processed – the frequency index (FI) of dialectal forms was calculated. Based on the obtained value of FI, conclusions can be drawn about the use of dialectal forms – a higher FI indicates a more frequent use of the dialectal form of the analyzed language feature. Determining the frequency of using dialectal forms shows which features are most resistant to change. We used descriptive method to analyze the grammar content for grades 1 to 8 of elementary school in order to establish the representation of the analyzed features in the curricula. In the end, we compared the results of both analyses, reached certain conclusions and defined the potential directions of adapting the curricula to the speech habits of the students from Vranje.

The conducted research indicates that the dialectal basis of the Prizren-South Morava type in the analyzed speech patterns of the elementary school students from Vranje is considerably eroded by the influence of the standard language. However, some dialectal features are very resilient – the analytical *he*-construction, analytical declination and dialectal position of the accent. The sound *x* is particularly unstable in the sound system, enclitical forms of personal pronouns are unstable in the system of nominal words, while the same holds good for the perfect participle, apart from future tense, with ending *-ha* in the basis and third person plural of the present tense in the system of verb forms. For this reason, it is necessary to focus more on these language features in our lessons.

On the other hand, Serbian language curricula for elementary school give equal attention to all sounds, all types of words, and all sentence parts. In addition, the curricula for the grades 1-4 do not include the content related to the acquisition of the pronoun object, impersonal pronouns, comparison of adjectives, and the system of accents.

The adaptation of the implementation of the grammar curricular content can be done within the following frameworks:

- continued and gradual acquisition of the accent system from the grade 1 onwards,
- greater representation of the future tense and declination of nouns,
- acquiring the basic concepts of the pronoun object, impersonal pronouns, and the comparison of adjectives in the lower grades of elementary school,
- specifically prescribed content related to the use of the sound *x*, enclitical forms of personal pronouns and perfect participle ending in *-hy*,
- more space given to the present tense, specifically to its third person plural.

The analytical framework proposed in this paper offers a way for researching and describing pupils' local speech, which is important for a more efficient Serbian language instruction in different areas. With a larger number of respondents from different parts of Prizren-Timok area, further research using this model could contribute to the more innovative curricula and their adaptation to meet the specificities of the Prizren-Timok speech area.

Keywords: local speech of students, dialect forms, teaching grammar of Serbian language, Serbian language curricula

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