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Comparative and socio-critical approach to the novels Navel of the World by Venko Andonovski and Dobri dani by Marko Denić in German language studies

Extended summary

This paper presents the planning of lessons and the lessons themselves of the academic courses of Didactics of Foreign Literature and German Literature of the 20th century at the Department of German Studies, the Faculty of Philology and Arts of the University of Kragujevac during the winter semester of the academic year 2021/22. The teaching method concept in the novels *Pupak sveta (Navel of the World)* by Venko Andonovski and *Dobri dani (Good Days)* by Marko Dinić is based on a combination of analytical and performative procedures. The selected texts are adapted to the set goals, received as a whole, they correspond to the linguistic competence of students, and are topical not only because of the time in which they were written, but also because of the possibility of establishing a connection between the fictional worlds of the text and the world in which we live. In addition, they have a high artistic value, which is confirmed by the numerous reviews, translations and awards that the authors received for their novels. Tradition, history and culture, but also the present and the future, are deeply involved in their plots.

Teaching objectives involve the acquisition and strengthening of the functional competencies, with an emphasis on their social and socio-critical character. These objectives stemmed from the research questions as to whether the fourth-year male and female students of German studies possess enough functional competencies that enable them to be in the world of the novels without any disturbance, and whether the novels they read led them to changes in personal and social-critical reflection and engaged action. The qualitative methodology applied in this research was carried out through the research design of the case analysis as a complex so-

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cial system. The case was made up of a group of 18 students of the fourth year of German studies in Kragujevac in the academic year 2021/2022. Although they come from different parts of Serbia, they form a relatively homogeneous group with the same or similar responsibilities at the university and similar prospects for employment in educational and cultural institutions or other state and private companies. The results obtained in this way about the mastery of functional competencies in the context of the ability to reflect on social criticism, engagement, and the desire for changes caused by reading the given novels have a general dimension. The specific situation in which the discussion took place can be characterized as natural, i.e., usual: the participants in it know each other and communicate with each other even outside of the scheduled times for discussion. The discussion was conducted in a natural environment, in the classroom where they normally have regular classes. A slightly larger number of respondents participated than the optimal number, which in qualitative research is from six to 12 (Mayring, 2002: 77). The qualitative approach included a group discussion conducted in several phases, during the teaching process and after the performance. Group discussion is considered one of the essential instruments for obtaining data and, compared to other instruments (problem-oriented interview, narrative interview, and observation), it has numerous advantages significant for this research. Many subjective opinions and attitudes are related to the social group and are easier to verbalize in the group, especially if they concern taboo topics. In a familiar group, it is easier to overcome psychological obstacles when expressing them. It is especially suitable when public opinion needs to be examined, i.e., collective attitudes of the group, as well as prejudices and ideologies (Mayring, 2002: 77–78), which is the case in this research.

From the analysis of the statements of the research participants, the conclusion can be drawn that during the course of the project, the set goals of mastering functional literary competencies were fulfilled. They include the goals related to reflection and self-reflection, social criticism, and the transfer of the fictional world of the novel to the world around us, as well as the creation of the awareness of the need for changes in it, which were expressed in the performance and confirmed in the group discussion. The advantage of teaching that combines analytical and performative methods are motivating, emotive elements in the project that liberates, encourages, excites, and morally, mentally and emotionally affects the lives of all participants in it on multiple levels. The results of the research confirm that the basic goals of every literature lesson have been fulfilled - to read literary texts with pleasure and live literature for the whole life.

Keywords: literature, didactics of literature, social engagement, theater pedagogy, group discussion

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