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Methodological Functionality of the Components of the Textbook Definitions of the Subject and the Predicate in the First Cycle of Education

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Extended summary

The paper looks at the definitions of the subject and the predicate as the key terms of syntax which represent the basis for the study of grammar of both mother tongue and foreign languages. Apart from their indisputable syntactic relevance, these concepts should also be studied in terms of their representation in the curricula, given that they are taught in the three consecutive grades of the first cycle of primary education, and they are further analysed in the cycles following the first one.

Given the fact that the current regulations do not provide the guidelines for teachers and textbook authors for deciding what contents are appropriate for covering these concepts and what the development of the concepts through different grades should be based upon, both teachers' and textbook interpretations are full of inconsistencies (Mičić, 2010, 2016). On the other hand, "the appropriate selection of teaching contents, their distribution, interconnectedness and correlation are all crucial for the acquisition and development of the concepts" (Antonijević, 2001: 294). Textbook definitions as a sole representative of the content and scope of the concepts taught in the first cycle of primary education are the topic of our research. The same regulations are, in principle, based on a system of concentric circles and a spiral acquisition of the concepts. The assumed presence of the developmental concept (Vygotsky, 1996; Pešić, 1995; Antonijević, 2000) will be explored in the analysis of the textbook definitions of the terms *subject* and *predicate* by means of their excerption and presentation of the school definition components expressing the relevant characteristics of the terms. Apart from shedding some light on the components, the goal of this paper is to identify their functions in the devel-

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opmental concept of the in-class interpretation of the basic syntactic terms – the subject and the predicate – as well as on the functionality of the sentences used to illustrate them.

The linguistic studies and grammar reference books (Ivić, 1983, Ružić, 2005, Popović, 2008) were consulted in the process of identifying and naming the afore-mentioned categories to position them with a greater precision in the complex syntactical system. As the selected components (term, hierarchical characteristic, placement in relation to a sentence as a whole, structure, meaning, congruence, variability of the position within a sentence, auxiliary question, variability of the number of the subjects in a sentence) are not formally included in the curricula, they appear in textbooks sporadically and randomly. In this part of the research, the focus was on selecting the characteristics of the sentence examples used in the textbooks to illustrate the terms subject and predicate, as well as on comparing them with the corresponding components of the accompanying textbook definitions. For instance, the hierarchical definition of the subject and the predicate (*main part*) can be practically realised only on the examples of the sentences containing dependent parts as well and in relation to them. However, the majority of the textbooks in which this characteristic is presented contain the sentences with dependent parts only. When students analyse the examples of such structures, there is nothing in the sentence against which they could hierarchically determine the subject and the predicate. For this reason, we advocate the use of the textbooks containing appropriate examples where the hierarchical position of the subject and the predicate is determined relative to the dependent parts of the sentence, which can be accomplished in several ways (by establishing an analogy with some other phenomenon, through sentence contracting exercises in which the main parts are intuitively felt as obligatory, etc.)

The suggestions for a systemic organisation of teaching include the corrections of the curricula by (1) defining the components of meaning necessary for students at a specific period of development to understand certain concepts and (2) defining the developmental periods in which the existing knowledge must be upgraded. As a result, the necessary developmental steps would be planned systemically, instead of being left at mercy of teachers' and textbook writers' intuitions. Some textbooks tend to present new characteristics of the terms in the model sentences, despite the fact that they are not always present in the definitions (variability of the position within a sentence, variability of the number of words in the subject group, variability of the number of the subjects in a sentence). One solution to this problem could be to determine precisely the path of the development of the concepts throughout the teaching process by determining (1) the components of the meaning of concepts and (2) the order in which the concepts will be introduced (3) successive complementation and development (modification, restructuring) of the formed concepts, (4) the characteristics of the sentences used as examples for illustrating the concepts.

A systemic introduction of the characteristics of the terms would enable the monitoring of their development. Consequently, teachers would have a better insight into their students' foreknowledge on which further learning, deepening and modification of knowledge should be based. More precise definitions of the components of the school definition in the future curricula could improve both the quality of the textbooks and the teaching of syntax.

Key words: term, school definition, characteristic of a term, subject, predicate, lingo-methodological template.

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