



PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

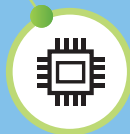
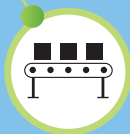


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THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION¹

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INTRODUCTION

The strategic aim of each developed society is efficient education. Quality education² (secondary school education in particular) has a long-term effect on the level of language literacy, especially knowing that in a modern society adequate levels of basic language (language and communication competences), mathematical, scientific, computer, and reading literacy represent a prerequisite for each individual to fulfil their potential (Gelman & Butterworth, 2005; Schleicher, 2019), participate actively in society and shoulder their social responsibility, while a higher level of these skills broadens the choice of possibilities in the labour market and provides higher achievement in lifelong learning (OECD, 2016). As a matter of fact, acquisition of basic academic skills (such as reading, writing and mathematics) is a prerequisite for adequate school achievement. Besides, language literacy is the basis for the development of all other forms and levels of literacy. "Language literacy is an essential step in primary education because if a student does not master the basic skills of reading and writing and if a student does not master the principles according to which the mother tongue functions..." (Trivić & Stevanović, 2012: 159) ... the student will not be academically successful in the majority of subjects. The basis of general primary education in Serbia is the study of the Serbian literary language and its norms and the only way to evaluate what individual students have learnt is to enable them to express themselves by applying these norms of language culture (orally and in writing).

1 This research was funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Contract No. 451-03-9/2021-14/200018).

2 In Serbia, the process of education modernisation follows the models of other European societies (Avramović, 2011), but it lacks the social status it should have.

The basics of language culture theory as a linguistic discipline were established by a group of linguists known as the Prague Linguistic Circle. According to them, language culture as a separate discipline deals with issues of efficacy and quality of communication and represents the basis of language politics and language-related education (Mukaržovski, 1986). A person with developed language culture must, among other things, understand the grammatical rules of the language as well as its lexical norms, i.e. the rules for choosing the right words depending on their usage in a certain functional style (Stanojčić, Popović, & Micić, 1989). Language culture can also be regarded as a group of certain language units and a group of rules for their use which create the literary-language norm; therefore, language culture means “the nurture of language” by synchronising one’s own expression with the norm regulations (Simić, 1983: 77). While acquiring the language culture rules, an individual should focus on the entire literary language norm, on ethical definitions of his/her people, and on the aims and circumstances of communication. The language culture of an individual defines to what degree the individual understands the language, as well as his/her ability to apply the knowledge while fulfilling cultural needs (Simić, 2001a). Therefore, the basis of language culture is the literary language norm (in this case the Serbian language norm).

From the aspect of the Serbian language methodology, the term *language culture* refers to one of the three areas covered by Serbian language classes in Serbian primary and secondary schools. Namely, Serbian language classes in primary and secondary schools are based on three different, but complementary areas: *language classes* (grammar and orthography), *literature classes*, and *language culture classes* (oral and written expression). Language culture can be regarded as a separate but also an applied area in the Serbian language and literature curriculum. Interdependence of language culture and grammar is easy to understand, but it is especially important to link language culture classes with literature classes. A literary work, as an ultimate expression of language creativity, is achieved by using language and stylistic tools to build both literary and language affinities of students (Stevanović, 2020).

Some of the most important tasks/goals and (according to the current curriculum) outcomes of Serbian language and literature classes are the acquisition, nurture and development of students’ language culture. Moreover, classes in almost all other subjects indirectly rely on language culture, which

makes it even more important for entire education. Language culture is necessary for students to be successful in many other school activities. Namely, it is of great importance which language tools a student will choose to present what he/she has learnt in most of the subjects, not just in Serbian language classes, as well as how the student will apply all the knowledge acquired during the classes of language culture in formal and informal communication, which refers to the functional role of language culture. As a matter of fact, language culture is an elementary skill needed throughout entire primary and secondary school education (Stevanović, 2019).

Apart from the relevance of Serbian language and literature as a subject in the educational system, Stevanović and Dimitrijević emphasise the following: "The significance of this subject can be analysed at two levels. First of all, most subjects rely on language communication. For the classes to be held, it is necessary that both teachers and other participants in communication (students) understand the laws of the Serbian language system and that they apply the acquired language rules practically, which means that their language culture is developed, that they read and write, that they interpret different phenomena and systematically express their thoughts" (Stevanović & Dimitrijević, 2013: 382). Language is considered to be the pivot of human experience-based learning, which means that teaching students to express themselves appropriately both orally and in writing (in other words, language communication/language culture) is the core of the teaching-learning process. Serbian language and literature classes reflect students' affective and intellectual abilities. They are especially important in developing abstract thinking ability because thinking and language complement and encourage each other and cannot be separated.

If we compare the goal, tasks, and outcomes of Serbian language classes with research results and school practice, there is a discrepancy between what we expect from the language culture classes and the reality. According to available literature, language is generally analysed regardless of the reality it refers to (Stevanović, 2012). Students' language knowledge is mostly declarative and focused on acquiring a certain grade. As a matter of fact, teaching practice and research results related to this area imply an unsatisfactory level of students' language culture. Research points to the fact that students have not fully mastered basic language culture norms taught at schools (Dragičević, 2006; Janjić, 2008; Petrovački, 1997; Stevanović, 2019; Stevanović & Ivković, 2017; Vasić, Knaflić

& Petrović, 1993). Moreover, this has been an issue for more than fifty years (Marković, 1959; Šipka, 1959).

In accordance with the above-mentioned statements, the aim of this paper is to understand to what degree the goals/tasks and outcomes referring to language culture are the same or different in the reformed Serbian language and literature curriculum (for year 4 in secondary schools) as or from the curriculum which was valid until recently, as well as to analyse how functional the application of knowledge of this area is, i.e. achievement in language culture tests both for secondary school and university students, since they are the most advanced group of Serbian speakers. The first part of the paper analyses the status of language culture in the above-mentioned secondary school curricula. The second part of the paper analyses the achievement of secondary school/graduating students and university students in the language culture test. Also, we were interested to find out if there are any differences between respondents in terms of their gender, level/type of education, and their grade achieved in the subject Serbian language.

METHOD

The sample. The sample is appropriate and it consists of 239 respondents – graduating students of gymnasiums and four-year vocational secondary schools (from Belgrade), as well as final-year students of non-philological faculties of the University of Belgrade. The structure based on gender, level/type of education and the grade in the subject Serbian language has been given in Table 1.

The instrument. The test consisted of ten open-ended and closed assignments related to three areas in Serbian language/language culture: *grammar*, *orthography*, and *lexicology*, as well as of three socio-demographic assignments: gender, level/type of education, and the grade in Serbian language in year 4 in secondary schools. The test was created for the purposes of this research.³ Some assignments in the test consisted of several additional assignments. Accordingly, the assignments carried a different number of points – between 0.5 and 4 points. The individual score in the test was calculated as the total number of points achieved in individual assignments. The maximum score in the test was 15. The level of difficulty of

3 The test was created according to the structure of tests that students did in Serbian language classes in their primary schools.

Table 1. The structure of samples based on gender, level/type of education and grade in Serbian language (N = 239)

| | | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 109 | 45.6 |
| | Female | 130 | 54.4 |
| Level/ type of education | Vocational secondary school | 59 | 24.7 |
| | Gymnasium | 62 | 25.9 |
| | Faculty | 118 | 49.4 |
| Grade in Serbian language | Satisfactory (2) | 12 | 5 |
| | Good (3) | 60 | 25.1 |
| | Very good (4) | 102 | 42.7 |
| | Excellent (5) | 65 | 27.2 |

assignments was synchronised with the Serbian language curriculum for higher grades of primary school.⁴ The first assignment was to write the adequate form of the noun with the meaning *onaj koji daje* (*the one who donates*) in the sentence *On je dobrovoljni (____) krvi* (*He is a voluntary blood (____)*). The second assignment was to write the adequate form of the aorist tense of the verb *biti* (*to be*) in the sentence *Ja (____) išao u pozorište* (*I (____) to the theatre*). The third assignment was to reformulate incorrect sentences so that they would be in accordance with the standard Serbian language: *Ako se izvineš, ponećemo ti torbu*; *On će da dođe sutra*; *Trebam da idem u biblioteku* (*If you say I'm sorry, we'll take your bag*; *He'll come tomorrow*; *I should go to the library* (accurate English translation of non-standard Serbian sentences)). The fourth assignment was to choose the option with correctly written words out of four offered options: a) *podpretsednik, otpatci, hemiski, izšarati*; b) *potpretsednik, odpaci, hemiski, išarati*; c) *potpredsednik, otpaci, hemijski, išarati*; d) *potprecdednik, odpaci, hemijski, išarati* (*misspelt words in Serbian, option C is correct*). The fifth assignment consisted of seven options and each option had only one accurately written word (in accordance with the Serbian orthographic norm); respondents were asked to underline the accurately written word: a) *svetloplav, svetlo-plav, svetlo plav*; (*the*

4 Since all respondents (secondary school and university students) had been taught according to the Serbian language curriculum for primary schools (upper years), the assignments have been synchronised with these contents. It is assumed that respondents have fully mastered the material prescribed until the end of year 4 in secondary schools and that they can apply it spontaneously while communicating as well as in tests.

first option is correct, the rule of hyphenation) b) auto put, auto-put, autoput; (the second option is correct, the rule of hyphenation) c) 48 časovni, 48-časovni, 48-mo časovni; (the second option is correct, the rule of hyphenation with numbers) d) ni u čemu, niučemu, u ničemu; (the first option is correct, orthographic rule of separating the short word 'ni') e) sa mnom, zamnom, predamnom; (the first option is correct, orthographic rule of writing prepositions) f) nijedan, ni jedan, nijedan jedini; (the first option is correct, the rule of writing pronoun 'nijedan' (none)) g) Prvi svetski rat, Prvi svecki rat, Prvi Svetski Rat (the first option is correct, the rule of writing capital letters). The sixth assignment was to write the comparative of adjectives *strog*, *visok* and *gladak* (strict, tall, and smooth). The seventh assignment contained two tasks – a) to underline synonymous verbs of speech in the given series of verbs: *podržavati*, *pričati*, *kazati*, *pevati*, *razgovarati*; (support, tell, say, sing, talk) b) to choose from the offered language mechanisms (synonyms, antonyms) one used in the following verses: *Živim na voću, vodi i cveću; neću da hoću, hoću da neću.* (I live on fruit, water and flowers; I do not want to want, I want to not want.). The eighth assignment was the following: Copy and correct the following sentence in joined handwriting in Cyrillic letters: U NIKAKVOM RUSKO SRPSKOM REČNIKU NEMOGU SE NA ĆI PODATCI O KNJIGAMA U IZDANJU SKZA (this assignment requires the respondents to recognise whether the following words and abbreviations have been written in accordance with orthographic rules and to write them correctly: *u nikakvom; rusko srpskom; nemogu; na Ći; podatci; SKZA* ; it also tested whether respondents were capable of writing the sentence in joined handwriting in Cyrillic letters). The ninth assignment was to circle the letter in front of the correct answer – In the sentence *Našu kuću je zadesila velika radost* (Our house has been overwhelmed by great happiness), the noun *kuća* (house) means family. The figure of speech used here is: a) metaphor; b) metonym; c) synecdoche. The last assignment was the following: Name the dictionary in which you can find the meaning of the word *učenik* (student) in contemporary Serbian language.

The course of the research. Students completed the test individually and they participated voluntarily and anonymously. Also, they were informed that the research was in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and legal acts of the Republic of Serbia. The research was done during academic years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020.

The method of data processing. The first part of the work used comparative analysis of the structure and the content of the reformed curriculum for the year

4 students of gymnasiums,⁵ which was adopted in 2020 and the curriculum for gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools (year 4) which was valid in the Republic of Serbia until 2020. The unit for analysis of the current curriculum were language culture outcomes, defined as the functional knowledge of students in a way that they demonstrate what the student will be capable of doing, performing, and completing, as a result of the knowledge and skills he/she had been building up and developing while learning the given subject during one academic year and to the fact that the contents serve the purpose of achieving outcomes. On the other hand, the unit for the analysis of the curriculum which was used until recently were contents related to language culture. To process data referring to the language culture test, researchers used the techniques of descriptive statistics, the t-test, for independent samples and Pearson's intelligence quotient. To verify the validity of data, i.e. respondents' scores in the given test, researchers used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

RESULTS

THE STATUS OF LANGUAGE CULTURE IN CURRICULA

The curriculum is an official document issued by educational authorities in accordance with the social development policy in Serbia. Therefore, without the curriculum, no subject can be taught either in primary or secondary schools, including Serbian language/Serbian language and literature.

For several decades, curricula have been key documents in Serbia and the basis for teaching at schools. They define the contents and time frames for the realisation of education (Vilotijević, 1999) and are the basis for the creation of school textbooks. Besides, the curriculum renders the teaching material completely solid, thematically. As a matter of fact, the curriculum contains a series of decisions on *what is* and *why it is* learnt, and then *how* and *what with* (Vilotijević, 1999).

⁵ Since only the graduating students of gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools participated in this research and since the comparative analysis of current curriculum and the Serbian language and literature curriculum for years 1 to 4 in secondary schools which was valid until recently surpasses the scope of this paper, we have decided to include in this research only curricula for year 4 in secondary schools.

In 2017, a new curriculum for all subjects was introduced in primary schools and gymnasiums. The curriculum should fully support the realisation of students' outcomes in all years in primary and secondary schools. Changes in the curriculum refer not only to the quantity or quality of the content, but they also include the following statements: the student is the centre of the process of teaching and learning; the curriculum is focused on achieving outcomes; the curriculum is focuses on developing subject-related and interdisciplinary competences; it recommends forms of teaching which largely lead towards the development of competences (project-based teaching, thematic teaching); the teacher is focuses on students' activities as well as his/her own activities and practice instead of just teaching [informing] (Stevanović & Milošević, 2019).

According to the analysis of the Serbian language and literature curriculum for year 4 in gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools which was valid until recently (Rulebook on amendments and supplements to the Rulebook on the curriculum for gymnasiums and for years 2, 3 and 4 of gymnasiums, 1991; Rulebook on amendments and supplements to the Rulebook on the curriculum for common subjects in vocational secondary schools and for years 2, 3 and 4, 1991), as well as of the currently valid curriculum for year 4 in gymnasiums (Rulebook on the curriculum for year 4 in gymnasiums, 2020) there are two important conclusions. Firstly, both curricula have an identical method – they reflect and support the importance of language culture within Serbian language and literature classes and they are mostly directed towards the improvement of language and functional literacy, as well as to the acquisition and development of students' language and literary culture. On the other hand, not much attention has been given to language culture, which means that both curricula are clearly more inclined towards other two teaching areas – literature and language, which is confirmed by the number of classes anticipated for the realisation of all three subject areas.

The authors of the curriculum for Serbian language and literature for the final year in vocational secondary schools and gymnasiums which was valid until recently prescribed a relatively small amount of material related to language culture for graduating students to study. According to the curriculum instructions, the knowledge students should acquire in this teaching area refers to the characteristics of functional styles, but it also states that only the characteristics of administrative-business style (petitions, complaints, business letters) should be worked on. However, there are no more precise instructions about the scope and

type of material that should be presented to students. Forms of expression are limited to presentation, analysis, discussion, literary parallels and essay writing (exercises). There is another area – orthography – and students are expected to practise only punctuation within this area; punctuation in itself is relevant, but it is not the only literary area important for becoming functionally literate because it is also important to upgrade and implement the existing knowledge and skills in orthography of the Serbian language in the final year in secondary schools. The part of the curriculum related to language culture prescribes only the introduction of rhetorical principles and terms and public speech exercises which will help students acquire certain speech techniques for performing in front of an audience.

Besides focusing on key competences and the process and outcomes of learning, the part of the reformed curriculum which refers to language culture for the above-mentioned age is even more deficient in contents which are not the aim *per se* but have the function of achieving a certain outcome, i.e. putting the acquired knowledge into function. Namely, the area is divided into two key topics: *orthography* and *oral and written expression* and the following outcomes have been listed: 1) the student is capable of applying punctuation accurately (full stop, comma, semicolon, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, three dots, brackets, speech marks); 2) the student is capable of speaking about language, literature and culture in public and in front of a larger audience; 3) the student is capable of writing an essay about any topic related to language or literature, respecting the rules of orthography and language norms. Also, teaching interpretations have not been fully developed.

Therefore, comparative analysis of the curriculum which was valid until recently and the reformed curriculum has shown, first of all, that there is no sufficiently comprehensive and systematic association of knowledge and skills acquired in language culture classes throughout education (by the end of secondary education). Secondly, both the contents and the results referring to this teaching area have been designed in a way that emphasises declarative rather than the essential development of the knowledge related to language culture. Namely, one of the basic curriculum requirements *that no language phenomenon should be treated isolated and out of the functional context* has not been fully realised, at least in terms of language culture.

It is also unclear why, in the reformed curriculum, some topics, such as functional styles, have been treated within the language area instead of the language culture

area. It is evident that the authors of the curriculum did not appreciate the fact that “the theoretic bases of language culture are functional grammar, functional styles, and orthographic rules”, which means that the language style is built on its grammar structures (Simić 2001b: 41). Besides, neither of the analysed curricula recommends any speech-related, linguistic, orthographic, lexical-semantic, or stylistic exercises which “enhance students' forms of expression” (Ilić, 1998: 554) and help them pay more attention to language norms and their roles in different language situations by applying their knowledge and reading various types of texts (such as a literary text), which, among other things, leads to interaction/ association of all three teaching areas of the subject Serbian language and literature: language, literature, and language culture.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE LANGUAGE CULTURE TEST

The total score in the language culture test is given in Table 2. On average, respondents achieved 10.44 points in the test out of 15 (M = 10.44; SD = 1.39). The lowest achieved score in the test was 3.5 points, while the highest was 14. Therefore, none of the respondents have done all assignments in the test accurately.

Table 2. The scores of respondents in the language culture test

| Descriptive statistics | | | | | Percentile | | |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-------|------|------------|------|------|
| N | Min | Max | M | SD | 25 | 50 | 75 |
| 239 | 3.5 | 14 | 10.44 | 1.39 | 10.0 | 10.5 | 11.5 |

Although this achievement is considered relatively satisfactory since 75% of respondents achieved up to two thirds of the maximum number of points, the result is actually not very encouraging, especially if we analyse the achieved results by individual assignments⁶ (Table 3) and if we bear in mind that the test consisted of assignments taught in primary school.

6 Considering the number of assignments and additional assignments as well as the scope of the test, special attention will only be given to some incorrect answers, i.e. to the answers which caused the greatest difficulties to secondary school and university students.

Table 3. Achievement in the test by individual assignments

| Assignment | Correct answers | | Incorrect answers | | No answer | |
|------------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------|-----------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| 1 | 230 | 96.2 | 9 | 3.8 | - | - |
| 2 | 121 | 50.6 | 110 | 46.1 | 8 | 3.3 |
| 3a | 213 | 89.1 | 23 | 9.6 | 3 | 1.3 |
| 3b | 213 | 89.1 | 6 | 2.5 | 20 | 8.4 |
| 3c | 233 | 97.5 | 5 | 2.1 | 1 | 0.4 |
| 4 | 218 | 91.2 | 20 | 8.4 | 1 | 0.4 |
| 5a | 77 | 32.2 | 158 | 66.1 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 5b | 96 | 40.2 | 141 | 59.0 | 2 | 0.8 |
| 5c | 95 | 39.7 | 133 | 55.7 | 11 | 4.6 |
| 5d | 233 | 97.5 | 6 | 2.5 | - | - |
| 5e | 221 | 92.5 | 18 | 7.5 | - | - |
| 5f | 137 | 57.3 | 98 | 41.0 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 5g | 189 | 79.1 | 46 | 19.2 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 6a | 151 | 63.2 | 86 | 36.0 | 2 | 0.8 |
| 6b | 229 | 95.8 | 8 | 3.3 | 2 | 0.8 |
| 6c | 227 | 95.0 | 7 | 2.9 | 5 | 2.1 |
| 7a | 219 | 91.6 | 15 | 6.3 | 5 | 2.1 |
| 7b | 148 | 61.9 | 89 | 37.2 | 2 | 0.8 |
| 8a | 169 | 70.7 | 66 | 27.6 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8b | 189 | 19.3 | 46 | 79.1 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8c | 233 | 97.5 | 2 | 0.8 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8d | 232 | 97.1 | 3 | 1.2 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8e | 231 | 96.7 | 4 | 1.7 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8f | 86 | 36.0 | 149 | 62.3 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8g | 224 | 93.7 | 11 | 4.6 | 4 | 1.7 |
| 8h | 232 | 97.1 | 2 | 0.8 | 5 | 2.1 |
| 9 | 54 | 22.6 | 182 | 76.2 | 3 | 1.2 |
| 10 | 19 | 7.9 | 85 | 35.6 | 135 | 56.5 |

According to the results, almost one half of secondary school and university students (46.1%) do not know the answer to the second assignment which is the aorist tense of the auxiliary verb *biti* (*to be*), frequently used in everyday communication and whose “increased use is characteristic of the communicative

functional style of the language" (Tošović, 2002: 403). The most frequent negative answers were the following: *bejah*, *sam bio*, *sam*⁷ and the substandard form *bi*. Moreover, students have shown inadequate knowledge regarding the formation of the conditional, i.e. they did not recognise that this form is used in the sentence *Ja bih išao u pozorište* (*I would go to the theatre*). Namely, the aorist forms of the auxiliary verb *biti* (*to be*) (as in the form *bih* which students should have written in the sentence) are the same as the forms used to form the conditional which is also often used in everyday communication. It can be concluded that they will not be able to use an adequate form of the given verb either in the aorist tense or in the conditional and that almost a half of respondents had not acquired what was prescribed by the curriculum for year 6 in primary schools (Rulebook on the curriculum for year 6 in primary schools, 2005) and have not, among other things, mastered the basics of grammar. Also, more than a third of respondents (36%) did not know the comparative of *strog* (*strict*) (assignment 6a) because instead of the form *stroži* (*stricter*), they used the substandard form *strožiji*. Therefore, the functional use of acquired grammatical knowledge (comparison of adjectives) in year 5 in primary schools (Rulebook on the curriculum for the second cycle of primary education for year 5 in primary schools, 2005) is inadequate for a third of secondary school/graduating students and university students. Similar conclusions were made by the authors of other research carried out in our area some time earlier (Stevanović, Maksić, Tenjović, 2009; Zlatić i Đorđević, 2014).

Orthographic assignments show that there are two orthographic areas where respondents demonstrated the greatest weakness. As a matter of fact, more than half of the respondents did not synchronise their answers with the following rules of Serbian language orthography: joined and separate writing of words *svetloplav*, *auto-put* and *nijedan*; writing the abbreviation *SKZ – Srpska književna zadruga* (*Serbian Literary Association*). Non-standard forms *svetlo-plav/svetlo plav*; *auto put/autoput*; *ni jedan/nijedan jedini* were used by 66.1%, 59% and 41% of respondents, which implies that secondary school and university students have not fully acquired the rule of joined and separate writing of the most frequent parts of speech (nouns, adjectives and pronouns) despite the fact that this should have been acquired in the upper grades of primary school. When writing an abbreviation in capital letters SKZ, respondents most frequently

⁷ Students who answered *sam* i *sam bio* have shown that they do not even distinguish between auxiliary verbs in Serbian (in the given examples, the auxiliary verbs *biti* and *jesam*).

used the non-standard forms SKZ-a and "SKZA" despite the fact that, according to the manual Serbian Language Orthography, when abbreviations in capital letters (such as SKZ, SANU, EU etc.) are to be used in a certain context (in writing or speaking), the morphological case suffix (e.g. -a) is not added to the abbreviation. Although writing words together or separately is one of the most complex orthographic sections in the Serbian language, the given results can imply that, during orthography classes, especially in secondary schools, not much attention has been given to different types of orthographic exercises and that certain orthography related knowledge has not been acquired. On the other hand, demonstrated (lack of) knowledge of secondary school and university students also has its roots in the fact that formal and meaning-related criteria referring to this orthographic area are not fully synchronised in normative literature, which can impede the acquisition of Serbian language rules for writing words together or separately. The fact that secondary school students often deviate from the literary and linguistic norm when using compound or semi-compound nouns and adjectives and collocations was also confirmed in previous research with the conclusion that neglecting the norm for writing words together or separately "can be considered a serious fault in the design of teaching materials, as well as in the realisation of language culture classes" (Stevanović, 2013: 304), both at primary and secondary school levels. Some authors also emphasise that secondary school students do not know the orthographic norm related to the ways for abbreviating words and phrases in the Serbian language well enough, but that secondary school students rarely use abbreviations in written tests in schools (Đorđev, 2012), which, among other things, shows that well designed methodology models and ways of implementation related to these normative topics have not been sufficiently implemented in classes of orthography.

Bearing in mind the fact that one of the most evident effects of education is reflected in language behaviour and its diversity, especially the diversity of vocabulary, the development and enhancement of the lexical-semantic level of language for students of all ages is undoubtedly extremely important. According to the results that secondary school/graduating/university students have achieved by doing the assignments in the language culture test (in the area of lexicology/lexical semantics), it can be concluded that the following assignments posed the greatest problem for the majority of respondents: less than a quarter (22.6%) of respondents gave correct answers for the assignment related to the polysemy

mechanism (metaphor, metonymy or synecdoche)⁸ used to acquire the new meaning of the word *kuća – porodica* (house – family) in the sentence *Našu kuću je zadesila velika radost* (Our house was overwhelmed by great happiness). This result was not expected especially since the curriculum for year 8 (Rulebook on the curriculum for year 8 in primary schools, 2009) prescribes studying examples of lexical *metaphors* and *metonymy* as mechanisms which give words new meanings⁹ (the teaching area of *language*), but the curriculum prescribes teaching *metonyms* as stylistic figures in the teaching area of literature.¹⁰ Therefore, it is assumed that graduating secondary school students and university students should not have a problem with recognising one of the most frequent conceptual and meaning-related mechanisms which structures not “only the language but, more importantly thinking...” (Rasulić, 2010: 50), which is often used in everyday communication and significantly influences the general verbal ability of each individual. However, the achievement of respondents who participated in this research can be linked with the fact that contents related to lexicology (lexical semantics) and language culture are not given enough attention in curricula and in classes, as well as with the fact that the “dogmatic-reproductive character of traditional teaching has not been overcome yet” (Rosandić, 2005: 203–204) where memorising as many language facts as possible (literal repetition of definitions and rules from different language areas) is valued. Such a method of learning a language and language culture, whose aim is to implement the acquired knowledge in everyday formal and informal communication, is not fully purposeful and not in accordance with

8 Polysemy, apart from referring to multiple meanings of a word, also implies the most frequent mechanisms for its achievement. Polysemy is defined as occurrence of new meanings of a lexeme with the help of lexical metaphor, lexical metonym, and lexical synecdoche (Dragičević, 2007).

9 In language science, studying the meaning of words takes a high position (Wierzbicka, 1996), because contemplating and discussing the meaning of words has been in the focus of researchers' interest for ages in the areas of the humanities and social sciences (linguistics, philosophy, psychology, anthropology etc.). Modern linguistics studies the meaning of words by thoroughly analysing the way words and sentences are used in a specific context (Kristal, 1987).

10 Metonymy is a “cognitive mechanism whereby one experiential domain is partially understood in terms of another experiential domain included in the same common experiential domain” (Barcelona, 2003: 215). Lexical metonymy is “the ability of many members of one thematic group of lexemes to transfer their names to other terms in the same domain of reality following the same model and based on a logical connection between them” (Dragičević, 2007: 167). The modern method of studying metonymy has enabled distinction and identification of three levels of metonymy: poetic metonymy (a stylistic figure), lexical metonymy (a language mechanism) and conceptual metonymy (the mechanism of thinking). Besides lexical metaphor, lexical metonymy is an integral part of the language, it does not have aesthetic but communicative value and it represents the finalised lexicalisation with the aim of diversifying the vocabulary (Kovačević, 2000). Radden & Kövecses indicate that “metonymy is an efficient means of saying two things for the price of one, i. e. two concepts are activated while only one is explicitly mentioned” (Radden & Kövecses 1999: 19).

the concept of the educational aims of teaching the given subject and its cultural and social functions. It is also, in a certain sense, in conflict with the fact that the diversity of vocabulary, its broadness and level of development, and the ability to understand complex meaning-related relations between words represent reliable indicators of language development (Bromley, 2007). Some authors believe that acquisition and diversification of active and passive vocabulary encourages (improves) metacognitive activities (Nagy & Scott, 2000), whereas the others emphasise that the ability to acquire polysemy (multiple meanings of a word), which is a type of metalinguistic awareness, is directly linked with vocabulary and reading comprehension (Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

According to data shown in Table 3, respondents have demonstrated the lowest level of knowledge in the last assignment where less than a tenth of them (7.9%) did not write the correct name of the dictionary of contemporary Serbian language where they could find the meaning of the word *učenik* (student). As a matter of fact, more than half of the respondents (56.5%) did not even try to do the assignment, whereas more than a third of secondary school and university students (35.6%) stated the following answers most frequently: *Vujaklija, srpsko-srpski rečnik*, *Matica srpska*, *Vukov rečnik (prvo izdanje)*, *Bukvar, srpski rečnik*¹¹ (*Vujaklija, serbian-serbian dictionary, Matica srpska, Vuk's dictionary (the first edition), ABC Book, the Serbian dictionary*). Although the results are alarming, it does not come as a surprise because "lexicology is treated less than any other area in Serbian language classes" (Dragičević, 2012: 98), which is especially the case in secondary schools. Also, this result shows that students have not been sufficiently stimulated in Serbian language and literature classes to use dictionaries, books of orthographic rules. and other language manuals independently, which might help them make the most of the lexical potential of our language and diversify their own vocabulary. Accordingly, teachers have an important task to develop the students' ability to automatically look up unknown words or phrases instead of carrying on without understanding the word or phrase and "achieving nothing but empty acquisition of words, pure verbalising that simulates the existence of certain terms but actually covers up the emptiness" (Vigotski, 1983).

Differences in language culture test scores by gender and level/type of education and the correlation between the test scores and grades in Serbian language. Data referring to differences by gender, level/type of education and

11 Examples have been copied literally, as respondents wrote them.

the test score are given in Table 4. The t-test for independent samples has shown that there are statistically significant differences in test scores between male and female respondents ($t(237) = -2.331, p = .021$). Namely, secondary school graduating female students and university female students achieved statistically a much higher test score ($M = 10.63$ $SD = 1.32$) compared to male students ($M = 10.21$; $SD = 1.45$). This result is somewhat expected and has already been confirmed in domestic and international research which show that female respondents have achieved better results in the domain of language and communicative competences (Burns & Mason, 2002; Gorard, Rees, & Salisbury, 2001; Stevanović, Maksić & Tenjović, 2009; Voyer & Voyer, 2014). Besides, data show that no statistically relevant differences have been established in the test scores according to the level of education and by type of secondary school, which can imply that, even though the concept of the curriculum for different types of schools is somewhat different, there is actually no difference in the way language culture contents are taught in gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools because language culture classes are carried out in accordance with the personal preferences of Serbian language teachers rather than with the clear, precise and complete norm (Stevanović, 2019). Also, the given result corroborates the fact that Serbian speakers do not upgrade their knowledge, either in language culture or in Serbian language and literature, after they graduate from secondary schools, i.e. in faculties and further education.

Table 4. Differences in language culture test scores between groups of respondents by gender and level/type of education

| | | N | M | SD | t(df) | p |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------------|-------|
| Gender | Male | 109 | 10.21 | 1.45 | -2.331(237) | .021* |
| | Female | 130 | 10.63 | 1.32 | | |
| Level of education | Secondary school | 121 | 10.46 | 1.45 | .170(237) | .865 |
| | Faculty | 118 | 10.43 | 1.35 | | |
| Type of secondary school | Vocational secondary school | 59 | 10.47 | 1.49 | .055(119) | .956 |
| | Gymnasium | 62 | 10.45 | 1.41 | | |

* significant difference

According to the analysis, there is a statistically significant positive correlation of small intensity between the test scores and respondents' grades in Serbian

language ($r = .289$, $p < .001$). It has been established that there is a statistically significant difference in respondents' grades in Serbian language in relation to the level of education – $t(237) = -2.053$, $p = .041$. University students ($M = 4.03$; $SD = 0.82$) have better grades in Serbian language than secondary school students ($M = 3.81$; $SD = 0.87$). There are no statistically significant differences in terms of grades in Serbian language between respondents who attend vocational secondary schools and those who attend gymnasiums (vocational secondary schools – 3.80, gymnasiums – 3.82). Considering the differences in the curricula for these two types of secondary education as well as the number of classes anticipated for language culture in gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools, the given results imply that getting a grade in Serbian language (often an inadequate one) mostly serves the short-term goal – acquiring the desired level of achievement at the end of the school year, which does not enable full functionality and implementation of the acquired knowledge and that “summative evaluation obviously has the priority over formative evaluation” (Stančić, 2020: 102) in the Serbian educational system.

CONCLUSION

Functional literacy is without a doubt one of the basic competences and it should be developed through all subjects and in accordance with the epistemological nature of offered contents. Communicative competence, as well as language competence or the native speaker's awareness of the formal structure of the mother tongue, also implies functional adequacy, i.e. the awareness of the situational adequacy of the language (Kristal, 1999). Acquisition of language competence and being capable of further development of communicative competence is one of the most important aims of entire education since it is a prerequisite for any kind of learning, as well as for the social adjustment of an individual (student) (Petrovački & Savić, 2014).

The language knowledge that students acquire during their education is crucial in the development and nurture of students' language habits, in the popularisation of language theory and its practical use, and in the improvement or impoverishment of language culture and thus general culture of students. Developed language culture enables students to express their thoughts clearly,

precisely, meaningfully and expressively and by following the principles of the literary norm, and it enables them to consciously choose between language tools in accordance with communication aims (Stevanović, 2019).

The results of this empirical study show that the knowledge about language culture – acquired by the graduating students of gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools, as well as students of non-philological faculties, does not fully serve its purpose and the level of their language culture is not satisfactory. The results of the analysis of the secondary school and university students' achievement in the language culture test show that none of the respondents gave all correct answers and that the biggest problem is the functional application of knowledge, especially in orthography and lexicology. As a matter of fact, the results corroborate the fact that lexicology and other kindred disciplines (such as lexicography and terminology) are given least attention in secondary school classes of Serbian language and literature because respondents achieved the lowest score in assignments referring to one of the basic mechanisms of polysemy which is inherent to the language – metonyms – and one of the most important and indispensable language manuals, the Dictionary of the Serbian Language. Accordingly, it is very important to remind students that they do not have to answer straightaway, but that they should know in what book/literature they could find the answer. This method is especially applicable when treating lexicology-related topics.

Since there are no statistically relevant differences in the score achieved in the test in terms of the level of education and the type of secondary school, which is an alarming indicator of the regressive direction in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills in this area, the concept of learning about language culture in secondary schools should be changed. Students, especially students of educational faculties where the professional language is indispensable, should also have a mandatory subject which would involve the rules of the Serbian literary language, i.e. language culture, in order to stop the decrease in quality of oral and written discourse of young speakers of the Serbian language.

Moreover, although the current curriculum is better because, among other things, it is focusing on results, it did not manage to “overcome drawbacks of the previous curriculum” (Kovačević, 2020: 32). It has been established that the authors of the curriculum for secondary school (year 4) which was valid until recently as well as the experts who designed the reformed curriculum provided

insufficient material/results related to language culture for students at this age; therefore, a new curriculum should be prepared whereby language culture would be organised in a systematic, precise, and thorough way and would encompass, among other things, recommendations given by those that the curriculum is intended for as well as empirical data related to the realisation of language culture classes in secondary schools. Accordingly, upon the issuing of the reformed curriculum, its implementation should be monitored through longitudinal research on a representative sample and students' achievements in this area should be evaluated before and after the adoption of the new curriculum. In this way, the reform would literally fulfil its purpose and serve for the improvement of language culture not just of young students, but the general culture of the entire society.

The results of this research primarily show that classes of language culture in secondary schools should include much more practical use of the acquired knowledge and skills by applying them in real language situations from everyday life. It is also necessary to increase the implementation of teaching strategies (e.g. cooperative learning) which will enable students to have a proactive role, to be motivated to associate new contents with what they have previously learnt, to make independent conclusions about different aspects of a certain language phenomenon based on the given examples, and to grasp the language phenomena and locate them at an appropriate level of the language system instead of passively receiving ready-made knowledge (Stevanović & Milošević, 2019).

Bearing in mind the drawbacks of this research regarding the size of the sample and the fact that young people who have studied the laws of language culture by following the reformed curriculum did not participate in this research, the results show that it is necessary to initiate national projects with a focus on developing and improving the language culture of children and young people in Serbia. Also, the results show that it is necessary to highlight the role and importance of language competence in the educational and broader sense. Besides, future research should, among other things, examine the attitudes/opinions of key participants in the educational process – students and teachers/professors – about the problems and difficulties they encounter teaching and learning language culture related contents.

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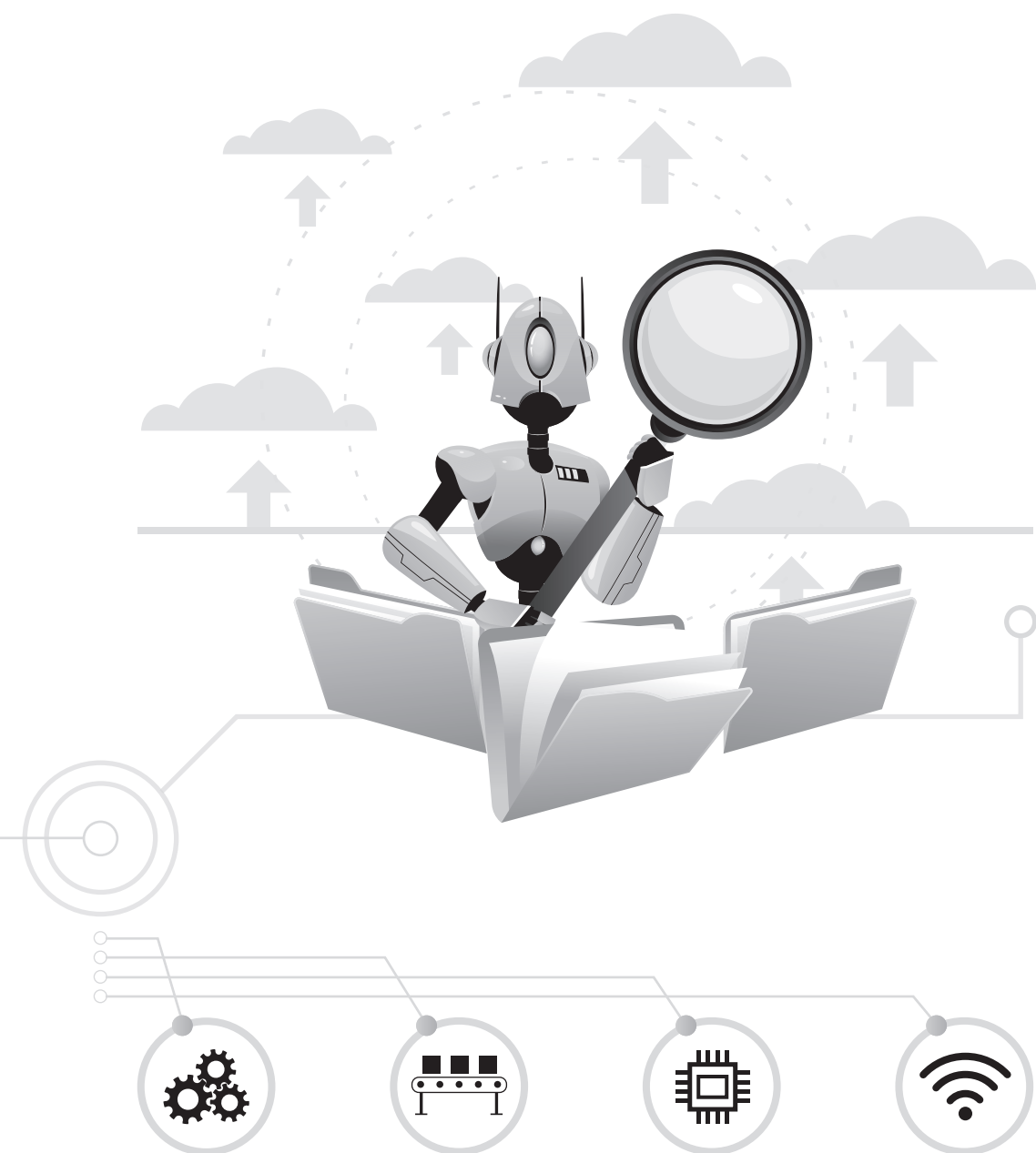
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FROM REVIEWS

Main aim of the monograph titled *Problems and perspectives of contemporary education*, is to thorough explore, critically analyze and elaborate complex, dynamic, multilayers and reciprocal relationship between significant changes in educational social environment and readiness, of educational system to anticipate, recognize, understand and adequately respond to those challenges. All contributing authors enthusiastically embraced the notion that education presents an important and proactive agent of social changes and consequently accepted all challenges as an opportunity for improvement and development of both society and educational system.

Professor Emeritus Djuradj Stakic
Pennsylvania State University, USA

The monograph is dedicated to looking into extremely significant and current concerns within educational policy and educational practice. The selected topic is viewed from the perspectives of contemporary theoretical approaches, but it is also empirically researched. A very large and relevant literature was used both for explaining the selected research subject and discussing the obtained results. A diverse, contemporary methodology was applied in researches, and the authors of works, starting from the existing results, analysed issues at a deeper level and illuminated some aspects that had not been studied thus far.

Professor Marina Mikhailovna Mishina
Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia

The main topics covered by the monograph can be classified as traditional to some extent — related to approaches to learning, language culture etc., and modern — connected with the andragogical view, coaching in teacher training, also the problem of distance learning during the covid pandemic, and models for preventing problem behaviors....The main leitmotif that permeates the content of all presented articles is the topic of the development of key skills, attitudes, experience, creativity — by both subjects in the educational process, and it gives semantic integrity to the monograph.... In view of the new social realities, a reasonable emphasis is placed on the continuing education and development of the teachers themselves, dictated by the accelerated pace of social change.

Professor Teodora Stoytcheva Stoeva
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