

ORTHOGRAPHY IN WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND TEACHING PRACTICE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS

ORTOGRAFIA ÎN TEMELE SCRISE ȘI PRACTICA PREDĂRII DIN PERSPECTIVA STUDENȚILOR

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Abstract

In this paper we bring the results of exploratory research conducted in order to know in detail the way in which high school students perceive and evaluate their own skills and teaching orthography checking, and better identify the problems that the students have while learning and applying orthography rules. An anonymous survey was completed by 100 students of the final grade classical Gymnasium (R Serbia) in June 2014. The survey results showed, among other things, that high school students are not familiar with the target learning orthography, nor the importance of knowing and applying orthography rules in written expression. This is a valid incentive for serious review of strategies to improve the teaching of orthography. It can be a starting point for the new comparative research to gather empirical material about orthography and teaching of orthography in neighbouring countries.

Rezumat

În această lucrare aducem rezultatele unei cercetări de explorare pentru a cunoaște în detaliu felul în care elevii de liceu înțeleg și evaluează propriile abilități și verificarea ortografiei de predare, și cum se identifică mai bine problemele pe care cursanții le au în timp ce învață să aplice regulile de ortografie. Un sondaj anonim a fost completat de către 100 de elevi din clasele finale ale gimnaziului clasic (R Serbia) în iunie 2014. Rezultatele sondajului au arătat printre altele, faptul că elevii de liceu nu sunt familiarizați cu învățarea țintă a ortografiei, sau cu importanța de a ști să aplice regulile de ortografie în expresiile scrise. Acesta este un imbold de a se revizui strategiile de îmbunătățire a modului de predare a ortografiei. Poate fi un punct de plecare pentru o nouă cercetare comparativă pentru a aduna material empiric despre ortografie și modul de predare din țările vecine.

Keywords: high school, orthography, Serbian language, teaching practice, written assignments

Cuvinte cheie: liceu, ortografie, limba sârbă, practica predării, teme scrise

1. Introduction

A very important segment of general culture is the knowledge of the standard language, which is arranged in a high level and unified by explicit standard. This standard deals with the prescriptive grammar, orthoepy and – orthograph. Serbian orthography is phonological, also a part is morphological and as such is applied from the time of Vuk Karadzic. Respect orthographic standards is obligation for all those who use the language (DESIC, 1994, 40) "the main role in fostering standards should have school" (DESIC, 2001, 19). In earlier, but also in modern research

and works of eminent linguists and normativists (VASIĆ at al., 1993; BRBORIĆ, 2004a, 2004b, 2011; ŠIPKA, 2011, 10) was pointed out explicitly and / or implicitly the fact that students in the Republic of Serbia (at all educational levels) are not familiar with orthographic norm, and that "would be good to make an extra effort in the educational process in order to record the state of repair" (BRBORIĆ, 2004b, 225). The causes of observed states are numerous and complex: a) lack of knowledge and lack of understanding orthography rules, b) careless attitude of students towards what is written, c) teaching practice which does not insist on the development of functional literacy of students, d) lack of textbooks, e) insufficient links between lessons of language and Literature and lessons of orthography, f) indulgence of teachers of orthography mistakes, g) absolutisation of phonetic principles, h) fostering less speech, i) insufficient definition of the curriculum, especially when it is about lectures of orthography in high school (ĐORĐEV, 2014a, 84). The above should be added that in teaching practice much more attention is given to the persistent repetition of orthographic material and less attention is given thinking about how students "understand orthography concepts, how they understand through orthography rules, and what are their attitudes about the importance of orthographic norms and the importance of its application" (ĐORĐEV, 2014b, 130).

2. The methodological framework of the research

The subject of this paper are attitudes of high school students about the orthographic norms in written assignments and teaching practice. The *basic research problem* can be expressed as the following questions: *How do high school students experience orthography and teaching orthography* actually – what students think about their own orthographic knowledge in the orthographic norms of writing tasks, the importance and usefulness of checking in and out of school? With *the aim* to introduce more detailed way in which high school students perceive and evaluate their own skills and teaching orthography checking, and better identify the problems that these students see in learning and applying orthography rules, we conducted an exploratory study. For data collection was used the *survey method* and to describe and analyze the data are used *descriptive* and *analytical methods*. The *research sample* is intentional – an anonymous survey completed 100 students of the final grade classical Gymnasium "Borislav Petrov Braca" in Vrsac (Serbia). The secondary level of education is chosen for several reasons: a) in high school expands orthographic material which is admitted in elementary school so high school students should to be well acquainted with the orthographic norm and apply in writing tasks; b) high school students, because of their age, have already been developed linguistic expression; c) completion of high school is for some students the end of formal education and the end of organized labor on the formation of written and linguistic expression; d) students who prolong their education should be able to accept the demands of higher education knowing the functional capabilities of the language.

The survey was completed in June 2014 and contained 6 questions: 4 closed type and 2 open type. Most of the questions require the students to briefly explain their answers. The *hypotheses* of which we went into research after determining the objectives are:

H1: Students assess their own orthographic knowledge insufficient grade.

H2: Orthographic area that students inflicts the greatest difficulty in adopting the orthographic norms is Punctuation.

H3: The rarest experience of students about written assignments is that it is a way to improve the written expression and test the knowledge.

H4: Students do not have a clear position that adults pay attention to orthography correctness of written text.

H5: Students do not understand what is about importance / usefulness of orthography in daily life (regardless of the job that someone is engaged).

H6: The students believe that the greater number of lessons devoted to orthography parties contribute to improving the teaching orthography in high school.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of student responses to the first question in the survey showed that more than half of the students (58%) evaluated their orthography skills as excellent, 38% of students think that it is very good; no student assessed orthographic knowledge as bad or insufficient marks (2) and poor (1) – Table 1.

Table 1. *Evaluation of orthographic knowledge in the students' perspective*

1. Rate his orthography skills	Number of replies of students	Percentage
a) low (1)	0	0%
b) sufficient (2)	0	0%
c) good (3)	4	4%
d) very good (4)	38	38%
e) excellent (5)	58	58%
Without answer	0	0%
In total	100	100%

Based on these results we conclude that *H1* – was not confirmed. As shown by the responses of students, the students *are satisfied with their achievements in the field of orthography*, which is *not in accordance with the real situation*. Written assignments and other forms of written expression of our high school students include, as studies show, often and quite big orthography errors (STEVANOVIĆ et al., 2009, 147–164; BRBORIĆ 2004a, 385–396, 2004b; ĐORĐEV, 2014, 83–95, ĐORĐEV, 2015), a poor orthography skills pupils show in the tests (BRBORIĆ 2004b, 221–225). Refer to a survey about orthography in school prof. V. Brboric of 2000 (BRBORIC, 2011, 66–69). Teachers are during the winter 41. republican seminar for teachers and professors of Serbian language and literature asked to rate the orthography skills of their students grades from sufficient (2) to excellent (5). Statistics show that, in the opinion of teachers, the average score of students from orthography is – solid (3.28) (BRBORIĆ, 2011, 68).

The reason for this attitude of students towards their own orthography skills can be the result of misunderstanding, ignorance of orthography rules and the decay of character checking in teaching practice. Students may not know they are wrong and that their orthographical knowledge lags far behind the self-estimated achievement if their fault is not indicated. On the other hand, the attitude of students is the result of several years of trend – that schools teach only for evaluation, and parents, as it sometimes seems, the more important that these estimates are high, regardless of the real level of knowledge that students have applied.

On the question no. 2 what orthographical areas are the greatest difficulty, for more than a third of students (36%) responded that there is no problem with any orthography-area (Table 2). Several students gave the reasons for their answer: *I'm sure of myself, I learned Serbian in elementary school; we were taught well by the teachers at elementary school* etc. That undoubtedly indicates that the orthography training, in the opinion of students (teachers also influenced), in its entirety ends in primary school. However, it is common that successful implementation of grammatical knowledge means, specifically – requires unity of theoretical knowledge and practical training. This educational aim can be achieved only through systematic, continuous exercises throughout the training, and it is given the relative lack of progress since the first grade to high school graduation,

it would seem that the end of school can not be regarded as the end of orthography training. It seems that the students and their teachers believe that the normative questions sole responsibility of the primary school. But by the end of high school acquired theoretical knowledge "melts" to overlook the omission of situations in which it should be applied, ie. absence of (complex) exercises which require developed and time-consuming work. On the other hand, it seems that in primary schools there is a belief that what can not teach or train the over eight years of work will be compensated in further education. As we see, in many cases does not happen, you can be one of the causes of "poor orthographic knowledge of our students" (BRBORIC, 2004b, 225; 2011, 101). A total of 27% of the surveyed students allocated Voice changes and relationships of votes as an area in which, when it comes to applying orthography rules, not coping well, followed by Done and dismantled the word (17%). Other, less frequent responses of students, are given in Table 2.

Table. 2 *Identify orthographic areas that students receive the greatest difficulty in adoption of orthographic norms*

2. What normative power is your greatest weakness?	Number of replies	Percentage
a) I have no problem with any orthography-area.	36	36%
b) The capital letter	4	4%
c) Letters	0	0%
d) Voice changes and relations votes	27	27%
d) Punctuation	0	0%
e) Done dismantled and write words	17	17%
f) Abbreviations	0	0%
g) Transcription	6	6%
h) Pronunciation	0	0%
i) Combination of punctuation and forms of text or style	0	0%
j) The division of words at end of line	10	10%
Without answer	0	0%
In total	100	100%

So, H2 has not been confirmed. Surprisingly, not a single pupil marks punctuation, as its greatest weakness, although research results orthographic norms in high school writing assignments show "that the proper interpunction is area where students have the lowest achievement" (DORDEV, 2015, 115), which confirms our earlier observation: *that students may not know that they are wrong if their error is not indicated*. By all accounts, it looks like Punctuation orthography theme is that onebypasses the most in secondary school teaching practice.

Students have explained their answers. The cause of lack of knowledge and uncertainty in the application of rules that are related to specific areas of orthography or orthography in general are the most often seen in: (a) frequent changes orthographic norms (*Orthography changes frequently, I can not handle this. I can not remember the changes.*); (b) the weight and the volume of material (*Very complicated. Simple – it is incomprehensible. Orthography is a complex issue. I do not like to study voice changes because it is too big field.*) (c) insufficient number of hours (*Orthography is less represented in class . The least attention is devoted to it.; Teaching orthography is not fundamental.*); (d) lack of training for the application of theoretical knowledge in practice (*I'm not*

sure how some of the words I should write. Sometimes I hesitate to dismantle the word even though I know the definition.).

One student said that "there are no specific rules or a system by which we learn the orthography", which indicates some shortcomings continue checking, among other things, to: (a) insufficient linkage between this teaching to teaching language and literature, (b) the remains of traditionalism teaching and insistence on memorizing material and its playback (*I can not remember ...*), (c) the absence of meaningful orthography exercises, (d) and the insufficient functionality of knowledge that students acquire in school.

The students demanded that describe how they see written assignments (question no. 3 in Table 3). This was the question open, and received answers students can be divided into three groups, those who have shown that written assignments the students are seen as:

- (1) (not wanted) commitment and time that the (relatively easy) gave a high rating ([Written assignment is]: *a good way to get a good grade, school by fulfilling commitments, a big nuisance*);
- (2) the ability to demonstrate their creativity ([Written assignment perceive as]: *the expression of thoughts and adoption of new ideas, the ability to express talent of a way to express feelings and emphasize imagination and creativity, as well as training for creativity, as well as very easy, because I have talent as a "lesson " for inspiration*);
- (3) verification of knowledge and improvement of literacy ([Written assignment is]: *an opportunity to demonstrate how we manage the implementation of the checking, spell checking, the way that the student demonstrate his linguistic skills; demonstrate literacy; very examination because the professor can see our mistakes, correct them and teach us orthography*).

The most frequent answers were that points out the importance of creativity (*For a successful assignment is required talent /if someone has/*) – this type of response was 65%, while the least of those who perceive these tasks as a way to improve writing and express check knowledge (12%). Our attention is drawn to the answer of a high school senior: "Written task – everyone thinks only during those 45 minutes." This begs the question of what is the preparation for drafting and analysis and correction of written assignments, as well as training in written expression, which should last throughout the school year. It seems that the extensive and demanding preparations, which should be incorporated into all aspects of the work on improving the expressive abilities of students, has been largely neglected, which is why the students lessons dedicated to the development of written tasks perceived as not only separated from other activities related to education in their mother tongue, but as the case left to the moments of inspiration.

Table. 3 *Pupils' attitudes towards writing tasks*

3. How do you see written assignments?	Number of replies	Percentage
As (not wanted) obligation and way that (relatively easy) gave high score	23	23%
The opportunity to show creativity	65	65%
Verification of knowledge and improvement of literacy	12	12%
Something else		
Without answer		
In total	100	100%

Analysis of student responses to the question. 3, as we see, *has confirmed the H3.*

The survey asked students to assess the extent to which they agree with the statement that "adults pay attention to orthography correctness of what is written". A total of 37% of the students responded "neither agree nor disagree" with this statement, 8% disagreed with this statement, 10% agreed with the presented completely (Table 4). His answers are explained in the following ways: *Few people today pay attention to the orthography (the exception is a professor of Serbian language). They are mostly in a hurry, absorbed obligations, and do not pay attention (for orthography). They themselves do not know the orthography. Few people today care for orthography / or: pay attention because they want to set an example for younger. Adults need to know if their child is writing, and how will it know if they themselves were written etc.* Other students did not answer this question.

Table 4 *Students' evaluation of the relationship of teachers (and other adults) to the orthography*

4. Adults pay attention to orthography correctness what is written	Number of replies	Percentage
a) I do not agree with this statement.	8	8%
b) Partially disagree.	0	0%
c) Neither agree nor disagree.	37	37%
d) Partially agree.	0	0%
e) I fully agree.	10	10%
Without answer.	45	45%
In total	100	100%

The obtained results *confirmed H4.*

At the open question no. 5 on the usefulness of orthography in daily life (regardless of the job that deals with a) *91% of the surveyed students did not answer*, which undoubtedly shows that students do not see (SEEING IS UNDERSTANDING, KLIKOVAC, 2004, 180), so do not understand what is the basis of the importance of correct writing. Other answers students can serve as signposts for introducing themes that promote the building of a positive attitude towards teaching orthography and application of orthographic norms. *H5 is how we see confirmed.*

Table. 5 *The importance and usefulness of orthography in and out of school for students*

5. Assess the usefulness of orthography in daily life (regardless of the job that someone is engaged) and explain your answer	Number of replies	Percentage
Orthography – a prerequisite for further training and progress	3	3%
Orthography – certificate of education of every person	4	4%
Orthography – for the successful understanding between people	2	2%
Without answer.	91	91%
In total	100	100%

On the question no. 6 students have responded as follows (Table 6): a little more than half of the surveyed students believe that the teaching in secondary schools can be improved by introducing a greater number of lessons devoted to orthography (52%), a significant number of students to lobby for additional exercises in this area (23%). There are many fewer road to prosperity seen in frequent essay that teachers regularly reviewed by paying attention not only on content, but also the regularity of what is written (5%). Some students indicate greater attention to orthography and grammar classes and those who are devoted to literature (4%), while the lowest number of those opting for greater application of directed readings (during the reading of the lesson the students would have the task, with the help of teachers, to find examples which illustrate all sorts of orthography rules, and also the most common orthography errors) (2%). There is, however, students who believe that teaching orthography implemented only in primary school (12%). Such responses confirm the fact of discrimination against language teaching, including teaching orthography in another round. As we see, *H6* is confirmed.

Table. 6 *Tips to improve teaching orthography from the perspective of students*

6. Teaching at the high school could be improved	Number of replies	Percentage
a) the introduction of a large number of hours devoted to orthography	52	52%
b) introduction of additional exercises in this area	23	23%
c) frequent writing a composition that teachers are regularly reviewed with special attention to the correctness of the written	5	5%
d) greater attention to orthography and grammar and literature classes	4	4%
e) application of directed readings	2	2%
g) Something else	12	12%
Without answer	2	2
In total	100	100%

4. Concluding remarks

The survey results showed, among other things, that high school students are not familiar with the target learning orthography, nor the importance of knowing and applying orthography rules in written expression, and therefore we believe that the high school teaching practice should be more attention paid to fostering the development of linguistic culture. In addition to the theoretical design of, on the way to improving the quality of teaching approaches, should take into account the results of ongoing research as well as empirical material. We believe that the results of this research can be applied at all stages of methodical practical work in the classroom checking. They can be applied in the training curriculum, in defining the goals and tasks of teaching languages, as well as in the selection of orthographic content, especially when it comes to checking continued in high school. At the same time, this is still a valid incentive to review strategies to improve the teaching orthography in R Serbia. It can be a starting point for new comparative research to gather empirical material on orthography and continue checking in neighboring countries.

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ANNEX

Survey for students

Dear student,

This is a survey that will if you fill in help to know in detail the way in which high school students perceive and evaluate their own skills and teaching orthography checker. You will also contribute that the teachers get to know better the problems that you meet in learning and applying orthography rules (in written assignments and other forms of written expression) so that they can adapt their teaching to pupils' needs and facilitate their path to literacy. This survey is anonymous. Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

1. Rate your orthography skills:

- a) Low (1);
- b) Sufficient (2);
- c) Good (3);
- d) Very good (4);
- e) Excellent (5).

2. What normative power is your greatest weakness?

- a) I have no problem with any orthography-area.
- b) The capital letter
- c) Letters
- d) Voice changes and relations votes
- e) Punctuation
- f) Done dismantled and write words
- g) Abbreviations
- h) Transcription
- i) Pronunciation
- i) Combination of punctuation and forms of text or style
- j) The division of words at end of line

Why? Explain your answer.

3. Describe how you experience written assignments:

Written task is _____

4. Adults pay attention to orthography correctness what is written.

- a) I do not agree with this statement.
- b) Partially disagree.
- c) Neither agree nor disagree.
- d) Partially agree.
- e) I fully agree.

Why? Explain your answer.

5. Assess the usefulness of orthography in daily life (regardless of the job that someone is engaged) and explain your answer.

6. Teaching orthography in high school could be improved as follows:

- a) The introduction of a large number of lessons devoted to orthography;
- b) Additional practice in this area;
- c) Frequent writing a composition that teachers are regularly reviewed by paying attention not only on content but also on the correctness of the written;
- d) Greater attention to orthography and grammar and literature classes;
- e) The application of directed readings;
- f) Something else.

