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TEACHERS ON THE EFFECT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES ON PUPILS' LITERACY

Summary

The article analyses current written school Lithuanian language in terms of problems related to the effect of the information technologies (IT) on pupils' literacy. The concept of written school language is defined as distinct from private written pupils' language used in computer-mediated communication; the necessity of researching into the interaction between these two forms is grounded.

Written school language is understood as a form of standard Lithuanian language used in the teaching process and in various test papers assigned to pupils both at school and at home. Written pupils' language is a wider concept as the same pupils also use written language during their free time, yet the latter is private, having formed in the context of wide possibilities offered by computer-mediated communication that have occurred in the last decade. Thus, present day pupils, unlike their parents' generation in their times, use two forms of written language almost equally (at least in terms of time dedicated for studying and leisure). The comparison of these forms of written language is necessary for the research of pupils' language in order to better highlight their individual peculiarities and demonstrate their interaction.

The basis of the research is constituted by data obtained through mixed-mode surveys of teachers of Lithuanian language in 2012. One of 8 parts of the survey consisted of two questions: *Have you noticed that habits and fashions emerging due to information technologies (mobile phones, computers) have an effect on pupils' writing? If so, could you describe this effect?*

These questions allow viewing IT both as technical means of computer-mediated communication – comprising electronic devices and opportunities offered by their software – and as a social environment where unique fashions, habits and communication styles thrive, which undoubtedly has an effect on pupils' written language.

120 detailed answers with examples of pupils' written school language were obtained. 87.5 per cent of teachers gave affirmative answers to the first question (whether teachers notice IT effects on pupils' writing), which means that, according to teachers, this effect is evident and strong. Answers to the second question allowed identifying ways that teachers describe the attributes of written school language connected to the IT effects.

The IT effect on written school language can be described fourfold: as a psychological, social, technical, and functional one. Habits of free computer-mediated communication are transferred to the written school language; therefore, pupils' behaviour connected with writing and learning thereof was the first to change (hastiness, inattentiveness, absent-mindedness, etc.). It has become harder to promote the need for order as pupils are used to writing as they please and do not realise the meaning of grammatical writing. The new mode of communication (computer-mediated communication) and incomplete – with regard to the Lithuanian language – software (making it more difficult to type letters with diacritic signs) has a remarkable effect on the writing technique. The form of writing used in the computer-mediated communication is transferred to the written school language: 1) diacritic signs, dots, capital letters are missing, foreign signs occur, etc.; 2) various abbreviations are transferred from the computer-mediated communication; 3) untraditional – i.e. characteristic to computer-mediated communication – signs are used.

The form of language that has emerged and is functioning autonomously in the free computer-mediated communication also has an effect on the style of the written school language. The following attributes of the free pupils' written language are transferred to pupils' test papers: scarce vocabulary, simplified syntax, spoken language word forms, jargon, etc.

The altered form of writing is merely one of characteristics of the changing written school language. A decline in literacy (in its narrow sense) is mostly discussed because it is the most prominent, yet there are more crucial changes connected to the quality of language used and pupils' incapability to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by language. The written school language attributes indicated by teachers can be referred to in further research of pupils' language and in search of ways to mitigate the negative effects of the free written language on the written school language in particular and on pupils' literacy in general.

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