

REGARDING THE CONCEPT OF STANDARD LANGUAGE NORMS AT SCHOOL

Summary

Assessment of linguistic skills of a pupil is one of the ways of introducing standard language norms at school. It constitutes an important part of the teaching process and allows a pupil to direct his/her efforts. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers have a clear concept of the standard language norms so as to refer to it when they assess pupils' language. Unfounded corrections of language can erode a pupil's confidence in his/her language.

The article analyses the concept of standard Lithuanian language norms applied at secondary schools in the process of assessing pupil's language. For this purpose, in the spring of 2015, data were gathered through the anonymous survey carried out on the internet-based system *apklausa.lt* involving 205 Lithuanian language teachers entitled by the National Examination Centre to assess written papers produced at the state Lithuanian language and literature school graduation exam.

According to the concept of the norm (in its broad sense) as a social phenomenon, linguistic norms are viewed as rules, habits and linguistic behaviour unfolding in a linguistic community over a period of time that is commonly accepted, both regularly recurring and undergoing changes. At school, the strata of the codified standard language norms is relevant. The article takes into consideration three aspects of the standard language norm: the content of the norm (what phenomena are covered by standard language norms introduced at school and what are their sources?), the nature of the norm (what phenomena of pupils' language fall within the field of prescription at school?), and the spreaders of the norm (how assessors perceive standard language norms?).

The following objectives were set for the analysis of the survey data: 1) to find out the sources referred to by the assessors as they recognise violations of the norm; 2) to analyse the difficulties faced by the assessors in the correction of language and style of written works; 3) to identify how the assessors perceive the benchmark of regular language upon which they rely in the assessment of examination papers. The analysis of the survey of examination assessors leads to stating that the following problems are typical to the process of assessing pupils' language:

1) abundance of sources followed in the assessment of regularity and style of school language and the resulting contradictions;

2) indetermination of the concept of standard language norms (the changing part of the norms, unevenly codified norms and areas of insufficient (lacking) codification of norms are particularly problematic);

3) excessively unstable inventory of linguistic errors and stylistic shortcomings of a specific period (the latter three to four years discussed by the assessors);

4) indetermination of categorisation of linguistic errors and stylistic shortcomings;

5) gaps in the professional competence of assessors as they assess phenomena emerging from a codification tradition as well as lack of capability to autonomously assess new phenomena.

These problems prevent the formation of a substantial standard language benchmark to be referred to by the assessors as well as create weak points in the assessment system where assessors' subjectivity may show.

The survey showed that the school painfully reacts to unevenness of codification of standard language norms and insufficient dissemination of norms; thus, those engaged in language standardisation should not miss the teaching process out of their sight as they accept decisions on codification.

In order to make changes to such a situation, one needs to revise the assessment system in several directions: to reconsider the professional basis of assessing the regularity and style of pupils' language; to update the main sources of standard language norms, especially those meant for school; to adjust the technique of assessment of written works so that it is more convenient; to raise assessors' qualification in a more active and effective manner.

KEYWORDS: standard language, language benchmark, standard language norms, language acquisition.

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