THE STANDARDIZATION OF ALBANIAN LANGUAGE THROUGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract: The process of standardization of Albanian language has started decades ago and still need some time to reach there. Instilling standard takes time, as it is conditioned by several factors, such as school which is the key factors that influences the instilling of norm. The use of standard in all Albanian speaking areal is a demand of society itself, of its openness, of the increase of information level, of a gradual unifying process.

The culture of a people is subject to a large extent by knowledge of the language of which it is expressed, and as such learning of Albanian language in schools, correct acquisition of standard occupies a wider dimension. The role of school in instilling and enrichment of standard, with intention to bring closer as much as from Albanian language, is irreplaceable. It is of importance the way of conceptualizing and providing of Albanian language in schools.

While following the problem of *dialect-standard* interweave on children of first and second grade, we had to consider the textbooks, which are of a great importance, as they mark the first confrontation of children with standard.

When they start the long journey of schooling, children are faced with two problems: the learning of language, acquisition of language as such, and the learning of meta-language. From this perspective, Shezai Rrokaj is of opinion that the subject of Albanian language should have a priority in school programs, and should have a special attention in relation to other subjects. Language, as a tool, serves all other subject, while language (meta-language), as a science, serves the knowledge of itself (Rrokaj, 2007:207).

If language as a subject ignores these two important aspects, in finding a fairer ratio, then we will be faced with artificial choices.

The main aim of language subject is to teach children in a correct and clear way their language and its fundamental components: understanding, writing, speaking. Whereas, meta-language should have a supporting role, and the information provided by it should be gradual in accordance to the logical development of children.

It is not the aim of this research the analysis of school textbooks, but just a glance of their impact in the acquisition of standard by children of first and second grade. It is of importance that learning of Albanian language does not become a scholastic subject, but rather posses a well thought content, associated not only with grammatical structure and phonologic system, but with vocabulary as well, especially in the enrichment of vocabulary with local words and not in the unnecessary use of foreign words that have become fashion everywhere; not forgetting that children of these ages are taught according to situations of linguistic *usus.*

Keywords: standardization, Albanian language, school textbooks, writing,

1. THE TEXT OF THE ABC-BOOK

In the region of Shkodra most of the schools, for their first grade pupils, use the primer "Shkronjë pas shkronje" ("Letter after Letter") of authors Mimoza Gjokutaj and Shezai Rrokaj. During our observations, we focused on this textbook and observed:

- The manner of textbook construction,
- The way how teachers transmit this information to children,
- Children's reaction towards the information taken from textbook,
- The degree of processing of this information by children and its inclusion in their speech.

Primer textbook is split into three parts:

1. Pre-Primer.
2. Primer.
3. Post-Primer

This distribution directly effects in the acquisition of standard. Of importance is that information should be given step by step. Children do not have an immediate confrontation with the standard, as the information is given gradually. In this way, it is easier for teacher to teach new things to children. Moreover, during conversations made with teachers, the positive side of the textbook is evident.

Pre-primer is the first confrontation that children have with the school textbooks and the standard. The information provided in this part of ABC is concise, without exaggerations, and according to teachers it helps them in the process of teaching.

While children take the new letter, it is enough time to instilling of the letter from pupils and to do the necessary comparisons with dialectal form of the letter itself or combinations that this letter might have with other letters,

the changes this letter undergoes from dialectal form to standard. This fact is observed starting from page 6 of the textbook, as letter **C** is being taught.

The authors have put as words (models) for letter C, such words as: *macja, tullumbacet*. It is very ease for teachers to gradually start to point dialectal distinctions in several ways, e.g., while pronouncing the words *macja,* the teachers distinguish between dialectal form *mica.* There is a moment to briefly talk about the differences between dialect and standard as well.

Same thing goes for the word *tullumbace,* which teachers can compare it with *bushiq,* a dialectal form commonly used in Shkodra.

Examples that can be given in the lexical area are enormous throughout the textbook. Teachers must:

- Construct sentences using standard words.
- Let children free to talk on topics related to these words.
- Clearly point out the difference between two forms of the same concept.
- Not use complicated concepts, rather a simple speech, understandable for children of this age.

Of great importance is the phonetic aspect. Furthermore, recalling the differences that exist between Geg dialect and the standard, we realize that the differences in the area of phonetics are bigger and more difficult to be acquired by children.

The first information given by teachers to children can start from Pre-primer. They should consider:

- Phonemes that in Geg variant are pronounced different from norm.
- Phonemes that are in dialect, but not found in standard.
- Groups of consonants that are reduced.
- Groups of vowels that are reduced.
- The stressed and the unstressed Ë.
- The accent given to words.

The teachers' task becomes easier, as we review the text of ABC, the words brought by authors as models for examples.

While teaching letter *ç,* it is a good moment to tell children about the differences with letter *q.* Phonemes *ç* and *q* are pronounced with difficulties in Shkodra, they are mostly pronounced as if were a single phoneme. Teachers must explain the differences between them, to teach the positions of language in the pronunciation of these two phonemes, while pointing out the importance of speech apparatus in our ability of word expression. Teachers must find as many of such words as they can, possibly known by the little ones, and not rely only on the textbook. Must listen to all the children and concentrate more on those children who have more difficulties. Meanwhile, the information expands and pupils learn the letter *q.* Inthe mean time, teachers have the possibility of:

- Giving more diversified examples,
- Comparing between two phonemes by finding words with them,
- Asking children to pronounce the words one after the other,
- Asking children to correct each other,
- Concentrating more on children with more problems.

This should continue for other similar cases, such as the differences between phonemes *dh/ll, nj/j, s/z, consonants groups, of diphthongs, accent, of ë, etc.* Throughout examples that are given in Pre-primer, the above mentioned identifications can be made. The words given for explanation of letters create the needed space for teachers to do a satisfactory work with pupils.

The second part of the book "ABC" is a period where the information given during the first few weeks of school, through Pre-primer, to be reacquired by adding more details. In this part of the textbook, the lack of letters within words is a finding that makes children to be more actively involved during schooling hours.

We made numerous conversations with teachers on the role of textbook in the standard acquisition by children, and all of them have admitted that the textbook has a special importance in this process. According to them, this is exactly why this primer was chosen, because the way this textbook is designed give teachers the possibility to give the needed information and for pupils to be active in what they learn.

Below are some specific elements from the textbook:

On page 20 and 21 of primer are the letters *A* and *I*. Authors have chosen the word *ariu* on one page and *miu* on the other page. Pupils are confronted with the group *iu,* which must be fully pronounced. At this moment, teachers should point out the difference of *miu/mini.* While learning *n,* in the textbook there are tables (tables are attached to all of the words) in which the missing letter should be filled in. The word *nëna* has four letters, and only the letter *ë* is placed. Children fill the missing letters based on the given model. The vowel *ë* is the one that makes the difference between Geg variant and standard in *nana/nëna.* The child, while filling letter in between squares, indentifies the difference between the two forms.

	ë		

Of course this is achieved after the teacher has pointed out to children about this difference. It would be better if such examples were to be explained from the white board. The number of such words are enormous: *nëntë, nëntori, hëna,* etc.

The same is valid for terminal positions of *ë* such as the word *unë.* In this case, in the boxes is placed only the letter *u,* while children by themselves should fill the ending *ë.*

Children are faced also with vowel groups such as *ua, ie, ue* in the words *luan, shkuan, bien, bluan, shkruan, u takua, u afrua, më quajnë.* These are words that children commonly use, but up to this moment are confronted only with their dialectal variation: *lun, shkrun, bjen, blun, shkrun, u taku, u afru, m'qujn.*

The consonants groups *mb, nd, ng,* emerge in the same way on children. Letter after letter, word after word, and the child increases the information of differences between dialectal form and standard. These words are encountered: *këmbë, mban, mirëmbrëma, mbaroi, mbushi, mbërriti, humbi,* which the child has acquired in the form of: *kama, man, mirmrama, maroi, mushi, mrriti, humi.* It is up to teachers to make these distinctions clear to children. Likewise, the differences in pronunciation of consonants *dh, ll, q, ç, k, g* should be clarified in the same way. The textbook contains enough words to serve well the identification of distinctions.

It should be noted that a positive element of the textbook is the methodology followed. Children get the information gradually, starting from the easiest, and continuing with addition of information based on children's age. The exercises, which are in increment, silently introduce the child in the world of language, thus starting this "confrontation" as a game. The child becomes active, and increasingly more involved in the game. At this moment teachers should be able to engage all children to participate.

Post-primer, the third and last part of ABC does a kind of repetition of what was given in the first two parts. It is time when teachers understand the level of the given information acquisition from pupils and identifies the weak points that teachers must reconsider. From observations made, we have reached to the conclusion that children show many different linguistic situations. Unlike the first two part, in post-primer, children are faced with long texts where are interweaved all of those linguistic differences between dialectal variant and standard of which children were confronted in the first two parts of ABC. This is the moment when linguistic information can be reoffered. Requests to learn poems by heart, to retell the given parts, to answer to the entire questions given after every text, are all in the service of standard acquisition.

As for the primer we cannot discuss about the differences between standard and dialect in the field of morpho-syntactic. At the age of 6, children do not have the needed information to identify these differences, as they are not studying the language as a science yet.

1.1 Second Grade Textbooks

After having completed the first grade and acquired the given information, children enter the second grade. They are not only a year older, but they are also in front of a new window of information, now they have new textbooks. In recent years, the concept of textbooks has started to change. The Language and the Literature (Gjuha, Leximi) as two separate subjects, inherited from tradition, now come as a single textbook.

Children find the unification of the Language and the Literature in a single text, which both help each-other. While in second grade, children start to get more profound information, which the textbooks aim to provide it naturally, and finish with the conversation *teacher-pupil.* The "Albanian Language" textbook, for second grade, is conceptualized as interweave of four key components: *listening, speaking, reading and writing.* Every lesson has its columns: Talk, read, write, and know the language. It is of importance that knowledge of language, creation of expressions of linguistic and orthographic, to be done in a practical manner. In second grade, taking into consideration the age of children, we must depend on children's intuition and linguistic experience. Knowledge of language system comes through linguistic practice, linguistic notions, which must not be given theoretically, rather practically. The same thing is valid for the orthography. Within that inherent nature, the teacher's job to identify dialectal forms and to compare with standard comes naturally. Moreover, children themselves are able to point out these differences, as they are in second grade and posses language information received from first grade, as well as they are followers of television programs where standard is the medium. At this stage, they can easily identify the differences between dialect and standard. Teachers must encourage this initiative, as the more they know the language the better they are able to distinguish differences.

The level of written language depends on the spoken language. Given this, these textbooks give importance to analytical, descriptive aspects. Teacher must encourage children to talk more and to express their thoughts simply and accurately. While children create flexibility in their expressions, teachers identify the mistakes that are found during conversation and keeps record of each pupil. Teachers' work is the key to children's success. From observations made in various schools of Shkodra region, we have noticed that there is a direct link between teachers' linguistic forming and pupil's linguistic forming (as mentioned earlier).

Second grade Textbooks begin with simple concepts and continue with complicated ones, starting with key concepts, such as the knowledge of speech parts, and continuing with specifics of each of them. There is an excellent interweave of lexicology, morphology, syntax and orthography. The child is naturally involved, as if it was part of game, and success should be observed here. Thus, in the first few school hours, children are taught the differences between noun, verb, etc., and later on with their respective data (always in accordance with children's age). At this moment, the child gets the data in regard to syntactic construction of the sentence, getting to know first the subject and predicates. Children are always requested to express, tell and describe, so within this process they interlace the information.

From conversations with teacher we have noticed that this new conceptualization of textbooks has helped a lot in constructing a linking bridge between pupils and the subject itself.

Now that children are older, have passed a year of schooling experience, and are able to acquire information of a more complicated degree.

2. THE "DIALECT-STANDARD" CONFRONTATION IN THE WRITING AND READING PROCESS

During this study we encountered a high percentage of the use of dialect by children of first and second grade, while they were free to describe something, to tell a tale or narrate something else.

We also observed that the ratio of *"dialect-standard"* confrontation differs when the child recite a poem or narrates something by heart.

The question arises: how this confrontation is represented in the process of reading and writing?

We will consider these two processes one by one. We will start with the reading.

2.1 The Process of Reading in the *Dialect-Standard* Confrontation

All of the observed children are requested to read. The text depended on their respective grades, as children of first grade had just started the primer and they were able to read a limited number of words. All the children read accurately by following the standard. Only a few children, especially those of first grade, made mistakes in word accent.

The tendency of children to follow the standard in reading is directly related to the process of learning to read. In contrary to the spoken language that he learns in his family environment and takes the characteristics of the environment by making this speech as his own language, the child learns the written language and the process of reading in school, thus making as his own the written language form and the method of reading that is provided by the institution in school. While at home he gets the first language information, the spoken language together with dialectal characteristics, in school he gets the written language, starting this process on bases of standard, and simultaneous to it the process of reading. This is the first moment that gives details on different percentages of use of standard by the same children in different moment: while narrating, while writing and while reading.

To children the process of reading acquisition is very different from that of speaking. At this moment, these questions arise:

- How the process of reading comes about?
- What mental processes are activated by children to transform the orthographic representation in a phonetic representation?
- What are the cognitive processes of reading of a language?

According to neuropsychologists there are two kinds of procedures of the visual processing of letter form. (Làdaves&Berti, 2002)

1. Lexical type (direct method).
2. Phonologic type (indirect method).

Both of the methods are sufficient to teach children to read. The direct method or lexical is also called *"the full speech method"*. The child learns to read as a whole, and not being able to distinguish graphical components of a word. During this procedure, the child is not focused at the letter, its graphical representation, but takes the word as a whole, makes a "shot" of it and relates this "picture" to the lexical dressing for oral representation while preserving the lexical side. To reach the latter, the lexical dressing, is not needed an intermediary state of phonologic representation. This means that after visual grapheme analysis is activated the orthographic representation of the entry lexicon.

Later on the semantic system is activated, in which are located all knowledge and words understanding. At this point the word is recognized. If the child is requested to read aloud, the semantic representation will have accession to the output phonologic lexicon, where phonological representations are stored, meaning the *phonologic buffer* (phonologic storage), at this point the subject is able to read. A schematic representation would be (Ibid.):

a. The written word.
b. The visual grapheme analysis.
c. The grapheme entry lexicon.

    d.   The semantic system.
    e.   The output phonologic lexicon
    f.   The oral representation.

While the child learns to read through lexical method, he is based on a seizure of direct link between writing of letters and their speech representation. Thus the child learns a variety of direct correspondents between the written forms of words and the spoken ones.

The second procedure or the second method of learning to read is the phonological method, in other words indirect. Through this method we go from the pronunciation letter by letter to the full form of the word. The child connects writing to pronunciation through an intermediary operation, by using rules of *orthography/sound* connections. This method is called *non-lexical,* as the child learn to read without the need to know the lexical value of the word. Just as well he can read *non-words* (meaningless letter joins). While the child uses the indirect method in learning to read, the cognitive processes that are involved go through several phases as follows:

    a.   The written word.
    b.   The visual grapheme analysis.
    c.   The grapheme segmentation.
    d.   The conversion from grapheme segmentation to phonemic ones.
    e.   The phonemic assembly (systemization).
    f.   The phonologic storage
    g.   The vocal representation.

The phonological method possesses these important passages:

1. The grapheme segmentation, according to which the letters sequence is firstly split into segments called graphemes.
2. Each grapheme unit will be transformed into a phoneme unit thanks to the *grapheme-phoneme* conversion rule. To the graphemes will be assigned the respective phonemes, e.g., to the grapheme *<b>* will be assigned phoneme */b/.*
3. During the phoneme assembly (systemization), each phoneme takes a single form.
4. The information will be sent to the phonologic storage, which is a specific task memory that keeps active the requested phonologic information for vocal repetition.

Both of the reading methods have positive and negative sides, advantages and disadvantages in relation to each-other. It is not the aim of this research to study differences between them. Our purpose is to survey the path that the child chooses in the process of learning to read, to see the relationship he has with the written from and to explain that which we have observed in children: *from one side the accurate reading according to standard and on the other side its rare usage in the spoken language.*

It is the close relation between the letter, the written word form and the method of reading that explains this situation. For the first time, the child is confronted with reading at school. The school textbooks are all written according to orthographic rules of the standard, thus the reading process will have as bases this graphical representation. Children learn to read this linguistic reality.

2.2 The Writing Process in the *"Dialect-Standard"* Confrontation

As mentioned earlier, the children under observation were requested to write the same tale they had narrated. The difference between the vocal form and written one should be taken into consideration. The children write the tale in the variant of their narration, while trying to follow the orthographic rules of the norm, although there are many deviations that are related to several factors. The opposite happens when the child phonetically reproduces the same tale. In this case the dialectal variant is dominant. The children's spoken language and written one has a notable difference.

Why does this happen?

To answer the question we must consider the processes that happen in the child's brain. *The psychology of writing has studied all the mechanisms through which, starting from psychological fact that is thought, is reached the material fact that is writing.* (Marchesan, 2002:9) In relation to these facts, she has studied the functioning of central and peripheral nervous system and discussed specific aspects of physiopsychology.

We will focus on two aspects:

1. To the content of what is written, thus to the expressed concepts that might be the same among many people (the children were requested to write the same tale);
2. To the form, thus the external image, because it changes: on different individuals it is represented differently.

Even the writing model assumes two procedures, similar to reading, one lexical and another phonological. Let's have a closer look.

According to lexical prucedure, the writing schematic representation is as follows:

    a.   The vocal word.

    b.   The sound phonetic analysis.
    c.   The entry phonologic lexicon.
    d.   The semantic system.
    e.   The output graphemes lexicon.
    f.   The graphemes storage.
    g.   The written reproduction.

This procedure corresponds to the lexical (direct) method of reading.

Whereas the phonological procedure of writing requires an intermediary state of phonologic coding previous to writing. Schematically is represented as follows:

    a.   The vocal word.
    b.   The sound phonetic analysis.
    c.   The phonological storage.
    d.   The conversion of phonemes segmentation to graphemes segmentation.
    e.   The graphemes storage.
    f.   The written result.

Graphemes (Bussmann, 1998:198) are Distinctive units of a writing system, considered to be the smallest distinctive units of it, and in alphabetic writing they are a written approximation of phonemes. Not always a grapheme is equal to a phoneme.

We should also consider that in the speaking and writing process there are other elements that intervene in their facilitation. A common aspect, rather important, which is more present during writing than during speaking, is the hand movement, which activates sensory-motor complex coordination that are automatic to adults, but requires concentration and continuous learning for the little ones. In the writing process have also bases the procedural memory (the hand movement to design the letter or the word) and the declarative memory, related to mental lexicon, by which it is remembered for a longer period of time than during speaking the concept to be expressed. In other words, the writing activates the mind and the brain according to a circular activity; words come out of the mind and are written by the hand, which in return sends signal to the mind: signals that are unconscious, but rather important in the process of reality construction. The mind must consider the signals of the body, movements of which are motored by our unconscious. (www.lua.it; Oloverio)

During execution of the movement may intervene masked and corrective processes dictated by the subconscious, which seem to have a lower valence on the final act. The reason is that the unconsciousness uses archetype language to execute the action, thus the machine-language of the computer brain, which the subconscious (the intermediary region between consciousness and subconsciousness) reaches it with delay, because it has to correct the movement that body has been ordered to do. The time to oral communication is faster than that of the writing and leaves little space to think.

Based on these data and reflections, we can assume that:

- Not only the cognitive processes of speaking, writing and reading are different, but even
- Psychological and communicative elements of these procedures make that our stance to be differentiated while applying them.

While writing we are more liberated from the sight of others and the confrontation with their mimic while listening to us. Just a laugh out of the context and many are blocked in their narration. The little ones are more sensitive towards this reality. The reaction towards the others' indifference or ridicule directly influences in the formation of auto-stimulus and perception of capabilities a child possesses. To children, to tell a tale means to tell about oneself, because they are identified with the characters and feel to be part of the narrative drama.

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