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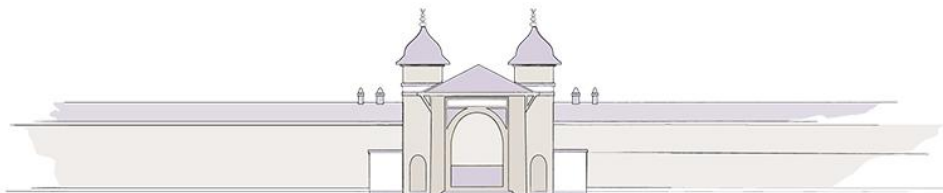
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TEACHING MACEDONIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Violeta Januševa¹, Jove D. Talevski², Milena Pejčinovska³

The paper focuses on the current state of teaching Macedonian as a foreign language at the Faculty of Education – Bitola, providing an insight into the teaching of the four language skills of the MFL – listening, reading, writing and speaking, to foreign students from Turkey. These students have found the Macedonian language significant for the realization of their professional interest at the schools and faculties of *St. Kliment Ohridski* University of Bitola. The paper probes the usefulness of the teaching content and activities offered in the textbooks for learning MFL. It also encompasses the most common mistakes and types of mistakes the students make at all four language levels. With regards to the methodology of MFL teaching, the oral and written discourse in class have been taken into account as well as the surveys and informal interviews conducted with the students attendants, and the achievements in their A1 and A2 language level examinations.

Key words: Macedonian language as a foreign language

1. INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Over the past couple of years in Macedonia, as a result of various agreements between the higher education institutions in Macedonia and the foreign ones on increasing the mobility of students, stipulated with the Bologna Declaration, the number of foreign students who continue their education at one of the universities in R. Macedonia and who are, thus, in need to learn the Macedonian language has increased. Therefore, as a new area in the Macedonian linguistics learning the Macedonian language as a foreign language is intensely undergoing development and becoming current affair, thus realizing one of the priorities of the Government for promotion of Macedonian language and Macedonian culture.

The study of Macedonian as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Education of the University of Bitola “St. Kliment Ohridski”, was launched as “Upgrade of the study programmes of teaching Macedonian as a foreign language (MFL)” – a part of the international project **TEMPUS project 158638-TEMPUS-1-2009-1-MK-TEMPUS-JPCR**, with seven participating higher education institutions – four from the Republic of Macedonia (Faculty of Philology “B. Koneski” of the University of Skopje “Ss. Cyril and Methodius”, Faculty of Philology of the University of Štip “Goce Delčev”, Faculty of Education of the University of Bitola “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and the American College – Skopje) and three from the member countries of the European Union (Jagiellonian University of Krakow – Poland, University Bedfordshire – Luton, UK, and Faculty of Philology – Ljubljana, Slovenia) which have a huge experience in the field of study of Slovenian, Polish and English as foreign languages. The result of the project activities are three books for learning the Macedonian language as a foreign language, comprising the five levels of learning the language and its four skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking in accordance with the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (which describes the language learner’s required competences regarding the six levels, respectively); all three books designed and written by the participating higher education institution team of the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius”. The textbooks offer an interactive approach to teaching, the emphasis is on communicative competence, providing quality communication student – teacher and student – student, and establish a correlation between all the contents and activities of importance for promotion of the Macedonian culture. The teachers who teach MFL are Macedonian native language teachers and speakers trained in special workshops for this purpose (some of them are professors in pedagogical subjects).

The paper focuses on the current state of teaching Macedonian as a foreign language at the Faculty of Education – Bitola, providing an insight into the experiences of teaching students from Turkey to ML skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking. The paper probes the usefulness of the teaching contents and activities offered in the textbooks for learning MFL with regards to both the daily communication needs of the foreign students and the potentials for their further specialization. It also encompasses the most common mistakes and types of mistakes the students make at all four language skills. Consequently, the paper offers teaching & learning tips corresponding to the needs of the foreign students.

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2. BITOLA FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND THE CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Following the needs of the labor market and the requirements of modern trends which inevitably impose changes, and being a higher education institution with a well-known tradition in education and training of teaching staff – pre/school teachers, primary school teachers, and language teachers, i.e. Macedonian (as a native language), English (as a foreign language), and German (as a foreign language), Bitola Faculty of Education is committed to continual implementation of the scientific and research achievements and perennial upgrade and improvement of the existing permanent education forms, designing them in accordance with the needs of the new era so that the teaching staff and the students would more easily handle the challenges they encounter nowadays. In this sense, the Faculty of Education strongly supports the thesis that different languages should not be a barrier to communication, but a source of common understandings and achievements. The promotion of European mobility, mutual understanding, and cooperation, as well as prejudice and discrimination overcoming are possible only through quality skills of modern European languages, that is the communication and interaction among nations in Europe and beyond. Within its Curriculum for Specialization in the Field of Languages, which offers training courses in the languages of the world, the Faculty of Education has upgraded its offer by adding the courses for learning the Macedonian language as a foreign language, thus enabling foreign students to easily integrate into the Macedonian educational system and continue their study in a field of interest at other Macedonian university institutions, and meeting the needs of the diplomats and other foreigners interested in learning the Macedonian language, whatever the reasons of the latter might be. While learning the Macedonian language as a foreign language, the students are developing intercultural and multicultural responsiveness, which provides better conditions for intercultural and multicultural communication. At the same time, the Faculty of Education supports all activities for promotion of the Macedonian language.

2.1. An Outline of the Curriculum for Specialization in the Field of Languages at Bitola Faculty of Education (MFL courses)

Once the University Rectorate has made a decision on approving the enrollment of a foreign student and the foreign student has been granted a temporary stay with an official Decision, Macedonian language preparatory classes contract is signed for every foreign student needs to attend MFL classes. Only after completing all five levels can the foreign students obtain the right to enroll in the university faculty that they have applied for. Preparatory classes are approved when the student submits an application for learning MFL, enclosing the necessary identification documentation. MFL preparatory classes consist of five levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Courses of 40 to 45 classes are run for each of the levels; after each course attendants take a test for determining their level of competence. The test examines all four skills: listening (25 points), reading and writing (50 points) and speaking (25 points), and the candidate is considered to have passed the test when achieving minimum half the points for each of the tested skills. After completion of the respective level the candidate receives a certificate for successful completion of the said level. The basic level of MFL is to help attendants to acquire basic knowledge of the Macedonian language and a solid foundation for the transition from basic level language user to an experienced user of the language

3. REQUIRED LEVELS OF COMPETENCE A1 and A2

(Basic User)

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages basic level language user should possess the following competencies, (s. Global scale, ZERR (CEFR): 2010: 26): Understands and uses familiar words and very basic phrases to satisfy personal needs of particular type; Can make simple introductions, answer questions about personal details (name, age, location, family members) or personal items; Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help; Understands sentences and phrases frequently used in the fields of direct significance (personal and family information, information on shopping activities, local geography, employment, etc.); Can communicate about simple, routine tasks requiring a direct exchange of information on familiar or daily matters; Can describe in simple language his/her educational background, immediate environment, interests or activities; Can construct some simple written structures, such as filling out a form or writing a postcard.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the academic year 2013/2014, the Faculty of Education had 20 attendants of the MFL A1 and A2 courses. Macedonian was a foreign language to all of these attendants. Neither they nor anybody from their family had ever been in contact with the Macedonian language and Macedonian culture, therefore the emphasis in the analysis here is on the language use in the two domains of Fishman's sociolinguistic theory (s. Fishman, 1978) – friendship (spare time and social life) and education. In addition, the attendants had poor command of the English language. For the purpose of this research a survey was conducted with these attendants after the A1 and A2 courses and the A1 and A2 competence tests. The first part of the survey used questions in relation to the following elements: self-assessment of the level of language competence in all four language skills, assessment of the usefulness of lexical sections in the textbook for the study of MFL, assessment of the usefulness of grammar sections represented in the textbook for the study of MFL, assessment of the usefulness of the contents and activities in class, assessment of lexical and grammar sections difficult or easy to learn, assessment of the amount of exercises represented in the textbook. The second part of the survey used questions relating to the following: students' views on their daily activities which entail the use of the Macedonian language, exposure (or no exposure) to the target language (Macedonian) by reading newspapers in Macedonian language, by watching Macedonian language TV, by listening to Macedonian radio programmes, by browsing the website in Macedonian.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In terms of self-assessment of the level of language competence in all four language skills, the following results were obtained: regarding the listening or comprehension skills of spoken text, most students stated that they understood spoken text very well, a small number stated that they understood spoken text well, 3 answered that they understood spoken adequately, and 3 candidates stated they had difficulties in understanding spoken text. In terms of reading skills or understanding written text, the following results were obtained: the majority of the respondents estimated that understood written text well, fewer stated they understood the written text to some extent, and few that they had difficulties in understanding written text. However, the writing and speaking skills, i.e. spoken interaction and production proved as weakest skills. The self-assessment of half of the respondents suggests a satisfactory level of these two segments of language implementation, the other half estimate that spoken interaction and speech production are unsatisfactory. The informal interviews with the attendants, their results in level A1 and level A2 tests, and our knowledge as language instructors in terms of oral and written interaction classes, fully confirm the above mentioned self-evaluations of respondents.

The test results indicate that most common errors fall in the field of phonetics in terms of writing the Macedonian alphabet symbols: *s* /dz/, *c* /ts/, *k* /c/, etc., because some of these sounds do not exist in the Turkish language, for example the sound *c* /ts/. Another obstacle towards acquiring the writing skill competence is the Cyrillic script of the Macedonian language versus the Latin one of the Turkish language. It is interesting to mention that those texts in the test papers that contained vocabulary related closer to the ones in the textbooks were better understood than those which contained different vocabulary, regardless of the fact that the vocabulary used in the test papers was from the register of words prescribed with the curricula for levels A1 and A2. For example, nearly all test candidates circled the correct answers to the questions regarding the text in the test paper about two friends shopping – Maria and Lenche, (as such a model of text on shopping is represented in the textbook), while the questions about the text on the Ohrid Summer Festival (the most famous cultural event in RM) were not answered by the majority of respondents (fewer respondents wrote incomplete and incorrect sentences or words only, which suggests that the specified text was not understood). This gives the impression that some of the models offered in the textbook are learnt by heart. There are frequently occurring errors as a result of the inability to find the required response to a question about a text, which suggests insufficient understanding of the text; the mistakes appear in the form of repetition of the question information in the response itself, for example, the question: *How old is the son of Eugenia (Kolku godini ima sinot na Evgenija)*, is often answered with *The son is has 8 years (Sinot e ima 8 godini)*, which implies confusion of the two answer models in the Macedonian language with 'is' and 'has'. Mistakes are made at the syntactic level as well in terms of sentence word order where there is interference from Turkish, i.e. Turkish sentence patterns, for example, *Son Evgenia 8 years old is* or *have* (Macedonian sentence word order follows the pattern Subject/Verb/Object, whereas the Turkish sentence pattern tends to place the verb in the end of the sentence). In the example above there is no possessiveness expressed due to the interference of the Turkish language in which possessiveness is expressed with corresponding case suffixes. Errors are also made in the use of prepositions of place: *над, под, пред, зад, до* (above/over, below/under, in front of, behind, next to), etc., especially in the use of such a preposition with a noun defined with a definiteness suffix: *Креветот е на под / The bed is on*

floor instead of *Креветом е на подом* / *The bed is on the floor*; *Гитарата е до телефон* / *The guitar is next to phone* instead of *The guitar is next to the phone*, etc.

Lexical sections should correspond to the goal of acquiring competencies for levels A1 and A2, and in that sense they should enable the student for simple conversations on daily issues in everyday communication. The results show that all attendants positively evaluated the contribution of the lexical sections in the textbook to their communication in everyday situations (shopping in a store, ordering in a cafe, simple introductions, asking and answering questions, etc., s. Božilak) and they found all the lexical sections as very important in this segment.

Recent research in this area point out the importance of studying the culture of the country whose language is being learned, so in that sense the lexical sections need to be structured so that students can become familiar with the Macedonian culture, tradition and customs, because learning the Macedonian language is in fact learning the Macedonian culture at all levels of language competence. All of the respondents confirmed the importance of the choice of topics in the lexical sections which would depict the Macedonian culture, that is they found the choice in the a/s textbook appropriate. As learning a language is learning a culture at all levels of language competence, instructors should also command both the language they teach and the culture of the country of that language, respectively (the history, geography, literature, customs, traditions, music, etc.). According to the assessment of the respondents, all of the lexical sections covering these topics are useful and important and therefore easy to learn.

Grammar sections should also correspond to competencies required at level A1 and level A2, and enable the course attendant to become familiar with the grammatical system of the Macedonian language in order to be able to communicate at the prescribed levels. The results show that all respondents positively assessed the grammar sections represented in the textbook and pointed out their usefulness in the proper communication of the message. In general, both the contents and activities in class have been positively estimated in terms of their usefulness. In particular, the contents and the exercises, that is the models of introducing oneself and one's country to the others, the cultural habits, traditions and customs, provide grounds for the development of intercultural and multicultural communication. The representation of the exercises in the textbook, was also positively graded; course attendants find the exercises in the textbook to be present in sufficient number. Most course attendants attribute a great deal of significance to the grammar sections and to all teaching language activities, and a smaller number of the attendants find grammar exercises and vocabulary lessons especially important. The most difficult grammar categories found were the possessive adjectives because possessiveness in the Turkish language is expressed with a case suffix. Errors are made in terms of gender of nouns, which is understandable considering that the fact that, unlikely to the Macedonian language which distinguishes nouns according to natural and grammatical gender, the Turkish language system recognizes the natural gender only. Frequent mistakes are made in the use of short forms of the personal pronouns, as well as in the clitic doubling with direct object. Difficulties are also apparent in the use of definiteness suffix, the Past Simple and the Past Continuous Tenses. In order to increase the intercultural communication, the instructor needs to discern similarities especially on the lexical level, but he/she also has to point out the cultural and language differences.

Despite the fact of originating from the same country, the course attendants were not a homogeneous group. They differed in their motives, in their needs and potentials when learning the Macedonian language, and this should be taken into consideration whenever teaching MFL. Informal interviews with the course attendants, the A1 and A2 test results and our insights regarding oral and written interaction in class, show differences in terms of the domains in which the Macedonian language is used, i.e. in terms of the attendants' no exposure/exposure to the target language, in this case the Macedonian language. In the friendship domain (social life and spare time) different situations in the everyday activities of the course attendants are associated with the English language and not with the Macedonian one. In this domain, only some similarities of Turkish and Macedonian at the lexical level help them in certain situations. Otherwise, if they need to buy bread, they will not use the Macedonian language but English (although they do not speak English well either) or they will simply point their finger at the products they want to buy. The same happens when ordering drinks in bars or when asking about a shop to buy clothes in, etc. In various interactions English is given the priority, and not to the use of the Macedonian language. In their spare time, none of the course attendants practiced the use of Macedonian when conversing with the others but the Turkish and the reason they said was easier mutual understanding in Turkish.

In the dormitory or in the apartment that they shared with others, most of the students did not use the Macedonian language but English in their mutual communication or in the communication with the landlords. Some did try to communicate in Macedonian, but when not knowing a Macedonian word, they would swiftly switch to English, though, as already mentioned above – not speak it well either.

In their spare time none of the students tried to read Macedonian newspapers or books, prose excerpts, poetry and alike.

None of the students watched the Macedonian TV (whatever programmes). Students preferred TV programmes in Turkish which are available on cable television.

None of the students listened to Macedonian radio programs (whatever the contents), nor did they ever choose to listen to radio channels with Macedonian music. The only contact with the Macedonian music was at students' parties when Macedonian songs were being sung and usually the most familiar fragments only.

None of the students browsed and used the Internet search engines in Macedonian language but either in Turkish or in English. It should be emphasized that there is a lack of Internet web pages with texts for learning the Macedonian language, such as the large number of sites for the study, for example, the English language. Taking into account the role of the Internet in the life of young people, this type of contents would be very important for the acquisition of the Macedonian language. Web pages with exercises and various activities for the Macedonian language acquisition would be especially suitable.

Regardless of the opportunity offered, none of the students showed interest and willingness to attend other courses run in Macedonian language beyond the classes scheduled for Macedonian language; those courses (Macedonian Literature course, Sociolinguistics course, Pedagogy course, Morphology course, Syntax course, etc.) implemented within other study groups are open in order to expand the exposure to the Macedonian language for foreign students and thus make it easier for them when using the textbook.

The education domain shows a different picture from the friendship domain (social life and spare time). It seems that this is the only domain where Macedonian language is partially used in a variety of interactions: student – student, student – instructor, student – students' affairs official, student – vice-dean, student – dean. etc.

However, this domain is not exempt from some deviations either. Namely, all the students kept making efforts to use the Macedonian language when in class. But there were moments when the explanation of a grammatical or a lexical unit imposed the use of the Turkish language or some other language familiar to the attendants. As a result, the instructors who were not familiar with the Turkish language had to use English, which was often proceeded with a conversation arising among the Turkish students trying to communicate the instructor's explanation to one another for not all of them had the same English language competence. This sort of discussions in Turkish occurred in interactions with the dean, with the students' affairs officials when resolving certain administration issues, with the MFL instructors, etc. Thus, in this domain, instead of the expected communication in Macedonian language only, the use of Turkish and English happened from time to time.

6. CONCLUSION

The results of the survey show that students are interested in learning Macedonian as a foreign language. The study relates to pragmatic goals, given the fact that further education will continue at some of the higher education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia. Students' self-assessment of their linguistic competence in terms of the four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking, confirmed with the test results, the informal interviews, and with our findings as MFL instructors, supports the conclusion that students' competences indicate satisfactory level, despite the errors, especially those regarding grammar which primarily happen because of the substantial differences between the two languages agglutinative vs flecational: expression of cases with suffixes vs expression of cases with prepositions and the Nominative of the noun; natural gender of nouns vs natural and grammatical gender; word order in the sentence, etc.). These features show the interference of the Turkish language, i.e. the Turkish way of expressing case relations used in the Macedonian language.

The survey results indicate the usefulness of lexical and grammatical sections in the textbook and positive evaluation of their contribution to the acquisition of the Macedonian language. It is important to emphasize the lexical representation of themes concerning the Macedonian culture and tradition. All of this fully supports the thesis that the basic level textbook is structured in a way that meets the needs of foreign students in terms of interaction in everyday situations and gives a solid foundation for the transition from basic user to experienced user of the Macedonian language. In terms of grammar which is most difficult to learn, the grammar section is to have those grammar categories included which differ most due to the different types that the two languages belong to.

The research results show that speaking and writing skills are less satisfactory. Our findings, students' test results, and the informal interviews we had with students as their MFL instructors, were confirmed by the results of the second part of the survey, that is the results of the survey indicating low exposure of students to the Macedonian

language. In this sense, this segment suggests further research to improve the a/s situation. MFL instructors need to engage students in activities which would make students realize their low exposure to the target language, thus spurring them to more active learning of the Macedonian language. Given that the students' native language and Macedonian language are unrelated languages, it is necessary that the MFL instructors put the stress on the communicative component. The analysis indicates the need for creating web pages for learning the Macedonian language as well as the electronic editions of Macedonian-Turkish bilingual dictionaries, and for designing textbooks for MFL for special purposes in terms of the academic fields that students intend to study further on.

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