

**Riddles in the Macedonian Language Educational Process,
in the First Cycle of the Nine-year Elementary Education
in the Republic of Macedonia**

Violeta Januševa* & Nikolina Lozanovska*

Abstract

Riddles have great importance in the development of child's personality. Among other things, they affect the development of the lingual competence, give plenty of material for speech development, accurate articulation of speech sounds and words, enrich the students' vocabulary, influence the students' self-regulating expression, and, of course, have many other educational purposes. Bearing in mind the importance of riddles in the educational process, this paper first analyses the Macedonian language teaching curriculum and Macedonian language textbooks intended for teaching and learning the Macedonian language in the first cycle of the nine-year primary education, regarding the pedagogic function of the riddles, their (un) satisfactory number, and their accordance with the students' age. Then, a survey among the teachers who teach Macedonian language in the first cycle of the nine-year primary education was carried out in order to have an insight of their attitudes toward the presence of the riddles in the curriculum and the textbooks, and their approach toward riddles in their everyday educational practice. The research has qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative paradigm, and descriptive design. The sample consists of the Macedonian language-teaching curriculum, the Macedonian language textbooks for the first cycle of the nine-year primary education, and of 100 teachers who teach Macedonian language in the first cycle of the nine-year primary education. Analysis, synthesis and comparison are the methods used for processing the data and gaining conclusion. The approaches of the teachers were collected through survey. The results of the research indicate that there is a need of more serious approach toward the riddles from the persons responsible for writing the curriculum and the textbooks in order for the riddle to keep their pedagogic function.

Key words: Riddles, Macedonian language teaching curriculum, Macedonian language textbooks, attitudes of the teachers

* Faculty of Education, Bitola, Republic of Macedonia

Introduction

A riddle is a phrase that needs to be solved. Originally, riddles were main components of different religious cults and folk beliefs about the existence of evil forces. Its function as a secret language is especially emphasized when man feared to name certain apparitions and objects with their real names and started finding and learning enigmatic words and successfully guard himself from the evil ghosts and mythological creatures he believes in. When an individual comes of age in the family, ancestry and social community, he is asked questions in the form of riddles and the one who will not answer the questions successfully is not considered intellectually established (Sazdov, 1992, p. 156).

In the period when man starts to form different understandings about reality, instead of the previous mythical-magical, the riddle receives a new role, from naming certain notions it is transformed in forming notions and objects from everyday life, achieving greater specification and actualization. In this manner, riddles get their artistic form, gain pedagogic character and function and develop as a poetic form in folklore (Sazdov, 1992, p. 156).

Riddles are folk creations with rich content that illustrates the surroundings of the child, as well as the appearances and objects it often encounters. The motives for the creation process of riddles are usually family and social relations, animals, plants, tools, objects for domestic usage, human body parts, but also appearances from the impalpable world, for example, dreams, etc. Riddles are filled with humor and satire, and through time, they help the child develop a poetic attitude toward reality and lead to development of its wittiness and wisdom.

Nowadays, riddles, which are part of the folk tradition and are short genre, continue to be created and to fulfill their pedagogic function. A large number of contemporary writers create riddles in the spirit of the folk riddles or are directly inspired from them (Popovski, 2006).

Characteristics of the contemporary riddles

The riddle can be defined as a short folk creation composed from a question and an answer (Sazdov, 1997, p. 231). Although they seemingly represent a short and simple genre, riddles are, in fact, complex poetic creations that have their own specifications and characteristics. Contemporary riddles are usually adaptations of the Macedonian folk riddles and usually undertake one of their parts or a certain metaphor that is a key to unravel the meaning of the riddle. What differentiates the

contemporary from the folk riddle is the tendency to rhyme, so rhyme is a present element in the formation of riddles. In addition, the contemporary riddles are closer to poetic creations and thematic broadened with objects, apparitions, etc. that come out because of the modern age (Martinovska, 2006).

Riddles and their educational value

Riddles have important educational value. Riddles help the learning process because they gathered experiences and different outlooks on life transmitted through generations, they introduce us to certain human features, etc. They enrich the consciousness and experience of the students and activate the thinking processes such as comparison, analysis and conclusion. They awaken the fantasy, enrich the remembrance, and activate speech. In addition, they influence the independent expression and the act of perceiving the logical order in speaking, the speed of reaction, the hearing perception, they develop the ability to create, they motivate creative potentials, they develop interest for Macedonian folklore, etc. They offer great material useful for speech development, also for enrichment of the vocabulary, for correct articulation of speech sounds and words, and have other educational purposes. Riddles help in the realization of the educational purpose of teaching, i.e. they help in developing a highly moral person that possesses cultural values.

Riddles in the educational process

Riddles are a component of everyday work with children in Macedonian language classes. They are used as an intro in a game or activity, sometimes as complement, fun or conclusion, and they can be included in a conversation about some story or fable. The teacher should explain the unknown words, if they exist and to follow the principle of successiveness. Riddles can be part of Art Education classes. The unraveling of riddles as part of the Macedonian language classes can motivate children toward artistic creation, i.e. the riddle and its answer can be represented through drawings. Through musical riddles, students recognize the source of the sound (auto, police, etc.) or the musical instrument that makes that sound (piano, trumpet, etc.). The sources of sound can be different: turning the pages of a book, crumpling paper, knocking on a window, sounds produced by some animals, etc. Musical riddles can be connected with the listening of short musical fragments from famous masterpieces that belong to different genres. This displays the multidisciplinary application of riddles in education; therefore, riddles have significant pedagogic values.

Riddles and the evolution of the children's linguistic ability and thinking

One of the tasks of education is to develop the children's linguistic ability. Correct articulation of speech sounds and words is particularly important. In that sense, riddles are speech exercises intended to correct irregular articulation, develop correct speech rhythm, intonation and melodiousness of speech, and to improve children's vocabulary. Therefore, they develop proper style of verbal expression and improve students' literacy (aesthetic and logical reading and correct verbal expression, easy and connected speech with correct rhythm) (Vasić, 1981, p. 25). The literature emphasizes that in order to understand riddles, children have to retain certain knowledge and their thinking activities have to be developed at a certain level. That is why it is recommended that the riddles should be gradually introduced in the education process. Knowledge and the thinking abilities are in mutual relationship. The resolving of the riddle allows children to learn, including a number of thinking processes, such as analyzing, concluding, deducing, classifying, etc. Accordingly, riddles affect the development of certain psychic functions such as attention, thinking, memory, fantasy, as well as thinking attributes like curiosity and independence (Peteh, Duš, 1987, p. 15).

Methodology of the research

This research has qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative paradigm and descriptive design. The sample consist of Macedonian language teaching curriculum for the first cycle of the nine-year primary education, Macedonian language textbook for teaching and learning the Macedonian language in the first cycle of the nine-year primary education and of 100 teachers who teach Macedonian language in the first cycle of the nine-year primary education. First, an analysis of the abovementioned documents (curriculum and textbooks) is provided regarding the pedagogic function of the riddles, their (un)satisfactory number, and their accordance with the students' age. Then, a survey among teachers who teach Macedonian language in the first cycle of the nine-year primary education is conducted with the purpose to get their opinion about the presence of riddles in the teaching curriculum and textbooks, as well as their attitude concerning riddles in everyday classes. The survey includes six primary schools in Bitola: "D-r T. Panovski", "K. Kaninski", "S. Naumov", "Gj. Sugarev", "D. Gruev" and "K. Ohirdski", and 100 teachers, i.e. to be precise 35 teachers that teach in first grade, 35 teachers that teach in second grade and 30 teachers that teach in third grade. Twelve questions (open and close ended) were used to collect the approaches that teachers have toward riddles in everyday practice.

Results from the analysis of Macedonian language teaching curriculum for nine-year elementary education and discussion

In continuance, the results of the analysis of the teaching curriculum for first, second and third grade for nine-year primary education and the discussion are given.

Teaching curriculum – first grade

The Macedonian language-teaching curriculum for first grade of the nine-year primary education suggests that 216 classes should be used in teaching and learning the Macedonian language in the first class, i.e. respectively 6 classes per week (p. 3). The teaching curriculum is divided in five programmatic areas: Literature – 60 classes; Expressing and creating – 26 classes; Media culture – 20 classes; Preparation for primary reading and writing – 30 classes; Listening and speaking – 80 classes. Riddles are included in the domain Literature that has the following goals: to introduce students with poetry for children and to encourage them to experience this poetry, to encourage students to practice memorizing through interpreting a poem and a riddle. The following activities and methods are recommended: learning and interpretation of a poem and a riddle. Riddles are also included in the domain Expressing and Creating. The following goals are given: a) to introduce the students with traditional speaking games. These activities and methods are recommended: activities where the students give answer to the riddle, telling a riddle, fast numbers song etc. (p. 14); b) to encourage students to create original pieces (their own riddles, jokes, unusual expression, short poem). Recommended activities and methods are the following: inventing speaking games similar to the traditional (p. 15). The teaching curriculum does not suggest the use of an Alphabet book, but the use of reading and writing books, approved from the Ministry of Education and Science, methodical guidebooks for realization of the teaching process and educational activity, as well as guidebooks and selections of didactic speaking games, are strongly recommended (p. 21).

Teaching curriculum – second grade

The teaching curriculum for the second grade of the nine-year primary education recommends 216 classes for teaching and learning the Macedonian language, i.e. respectively 6 classes per week. The teaching curriculum is divided in five programmatic areas: Elementary reading and writing – 70 classes; Language – 20 classes; Literature – 80 classes; Expressing and creating – 36 classes; Media culture – 10 classes. Riddles are included in the domain Literature with the following goals: a) to enable the students to read out aloud and to prepare the students to differ types of

texts. These are the teaching content: expressional reading, texts, poetry, prose, drama text, proverb and riddle. These activities and methods are suggested: the students should practice expressional reading and experience a text; they should discover the theme and the message in a text; b) to enable students to notice occurrences (happenings) and characters. The teaching content refers to occurrence (happening), character in a text (story, fairy tale, song and riddle). Within the method and activities, students should practice to understand and check what have been read (p. 10, 14). This teaching curriculum recommends the use of a textbook selected on the level of the school, Alphabet book, reading book, encyclopedias, dictionaries, magazines for children, Internet, audio-visual means, other sources for studying the environment (p. 15).

Teaching curriculum – third grade

The teaching curriculum for the third grade of the nine-year primary education recommends 216 classes for teaching and learning the Macedonian language, i.e. respectively 6 classes per week. This teaching curriculum is divided in five programmatic areas: Elementary reading and writing – 70 classes; Language – 20 classes; Reading, Literature – 80 classes; Expressing and creating – 36 classes; Media culture – 10 classes (p. 13). The Riddles are included in the domains Reading and Literature. The following goals are listed: the student should be enabled to recognize proverbs and riddles as folk wisdoms and to distinguish proverbs and riddles from other types of texts. The content refers to proverbs and riddles. As for the activities and methods, the following are cited: the student should practice to learn and use of riddles and proverbs and understand their content, to use riddles and proverbs while analyzing text i.e., discovering the message in a text (p. 8). This curriculum suggests the use of a textbook selected on the level of the school approved from the Ministry of Education and Science, Alphabet book (Macedonian Latin) and Reading book, encyclopedias and dictionaries, magazines for children, Internet, educational software, audio-visual means, other sources for studying from the environment (p. 13).

From the analysis of the Macedonian language-teaching curriculum, it is obvious that the riddles are given the prominence they deserve. It is clear that the curriculum anticipate the presence of the riddles in certain programmatic areas, the goals, methods and activities connected with learning and gaining knowledge about riddles. This indicates that the teaching curriculum is a solid base for the writers of the textbooks to include the riddles in them and to achieve the settled goals.

Results from the analysis of Macedonian language course textbooks for nine-year elementary education and discussion

The following refers to the results of the analysis of the Macedonian language textbooks for first, second and third grade of the nine-year elementary education and the discussion.

Course textbook – first grade

In first grade from the nine-year primary education, in the textbook by Ćamilova, (2008), consisting of 116 pages, there are no riddles. Neither folk riddles nor author riddles. It is understandable that the children at that age cannot read and that is why the whole textbook is illustrated to enable recognition of the letters. In the textbook by Strezovska, Simitkovska, Nečevska & Mirovska (2008), consisting of 120 pages, on p. 30 as part of the theme Vegetable, there are three illustrated riddles. According to the description in the riddle, the suitable vegetable should be revealed. There is no information whether the riddles are author or folk riddles. In the textbook, with adequate sign it is indicated that the teacher should read the riddles aloud, and the students should encircle the suitable illustrations. On the same textbook page there is an assignment – the students should invent riddles for the vegetable that is illustrated (eggplant and carrot), and this indicates that students are motivated to create. On p. 50, there are three illustrated riddles and based on the main animal characteristics described in them, students should guess what kind of woodland animal is described in the riddles.

Course textbook – second grade

In second grade from the nine-year elementary education, in the Macedonian language textbook by Ćamilova, (2008), consisting of 244 pages, the situation is different. On p. 83 there is a section dedicated to riddles. On the next three pages (84, 85 and 86) there are ten riddles. However, there is no information whether they are author or folk riddles. For every riddle, there is appropriate illustration that should help in solving the riddle. The answers to four riddles refer to objects, the answers to three riddles refer to animals or animal products, two riddles refer to natural phenomena. Only one riddle refers to a profession. From what is presented, it is evident that the author took time and made sure the material includes riddles that refer to different notions and that helps the students gain knowledge from different areas. Nevertheless, it is still questionable if this ten riddles in a textbook consisting of 244 pages are sufficient for the aims listed in the teaching curriculum. The students should be introduced to riddles and fall in love with them as a separate genre in folklore.

In the Macedonian language textbook by Krtolica, Trimčevska & Trajkova (2008), consisting of 168 pages, it can be noticed that riddles are given as addition while working on new material, while establishing the material or as homework assignment. Riddles can be found on p. 28, as part of the material for folk traditions. In addition, riddles are present on p. 41 and p. 46, as part of the new material whose message refers to the importance of books as inexhaustible source of knowledge. One riddle can be found also on p. 56. On p. 76, the riddle is a part of the elaboration of the text “Three breads”. On p. 86 the riddle is a part of the material for exclamatory sentences. On p. 87, the riddle is a part of the material for interrogative sentences. On p. 89, the riddle is a part of the handwriting instructions. On p. 91, the riddle is a part of the text “How much to talk” – folk story that compares the chattiness of frogs and one rooster. The important message from the text is that spoken words should have purpose.

Course textbook – third grade

The Macedonian language textbook intended for third grade from the nine-year elementary education by the authors Nastovska & Sevdinska (2008), consists of 224 pages. The riddles can be found on three locations. On p. 21, as a homework assignment, as part of the elaboration of the poem “My book” written by Asen Bošev, adapted by Tome Arsov. On p. 93 in the bottom right corner of the page, hardly noticeable, there is also a riddle. It should be solved during the class intended for elaboration of the text “The wizard and the birds” from Angel Karajličev in which in a figurative way, through birds, it discusses the year, months and the four seasons. On p. 164 and p. 165 there are 12 illustrated riddles, folk and author riddles (Kiro Donev and Ljupčo Siljanovski). As for homework, the students are assigned to learn many riddles from their grandparents and to share the riddles with friends. In this textbook, the students are advised to look for additional literature for children that include riddles. By doing this, the students are motivated to do a research in this area and expand their fund with new riddles. In addition, there is an assignment in which the riddles should be classified as author riddles or folk riddles. The aim is to apply the attained knowledge about the classification of riddles.

In the textbook by Spasovski, Grkova & Serafimovska-Lalčevska, (2008) that consists of 180 pages on p. 69 there is a riddle by Boško Smačovski. The unraveling of the riddle completes the elaboration of the text “White story” by K. Donev, and it refers to winter. On p. 147, there are five riddles and together with proverbs, they serve as examples for prose texts. The answers are not given. In the second part of the textbook, there is a working part. In that part students can exercise their writing, can compose sentences, poems, compositions, stories, tell stories, narrate stories and

answer. In this part, there are four riddles on p. 157, in Latin alphabet. In this textbook, students are motivated towards independent creation of riddles. The last riddle is on p. 182 as a part of an assignment about the usage of punctuation marks.

The analysis of Macedonian language course textbooks for first, second and third grade from the nine-year elementary education, shows that usually riddles appear as part of certain themes and they contribute towards the enrichment of the vocabulary, gaining knowledge from different areas, and motivation to create new and original riddles. Riddles are usually additions toward the elaboration of new material or are given as homework assignment. From the analysis of riddles in the textbooks it can be noted that part of the riddles are meaningfully connected to the material that is elaborated, but some of them lack that connection which gives the impression that they are given just to be there. However, we cannot say that they do not fulfill their pedagogic function. From the analysis, it can be noticed that the principle of successiveness was executed and the riddles were in accordance with the age of students. In addition, knowledge about the difference between author riddles and folk riddles was acquired. It is evident that students are inducted in research and in expansion of their own fund of riddles.

Results from the survey and discussion

In continuance, the results from the survey among the Macedonian language teachers that teach in first, second and third grade from the nine-year elementary education and the discussion are given. For the question: Do you use the riddles in teaching the Macedonian language, all the 100 teachers state that they use riddles in their everyday educational practice. This indicates that teachers are aware about the role that riddles have in the child's development. The answers to the question: How often do you use riddle in teaching the Macedonian language, show that 70 teachers usually use riddles, whilst 30 rarely use riddles. The answers of the question: Do you think that the riddles are relevant in teaching the Macedonian language, indicate that 98 teachers think that riddles are important in the Macedonian language classes, and 2 teachers give negative answer. The teachers were asked to give additional information for their standpoint that riddles are important in the teaching and learning. They state the following: riddles contribute to the development of logical thinking, stimulate thinking, wittiness and investigating spirit throughout discovering of apparitions and objects, they enrich children's expression and creativity, they protect the cultural heritage. According to the teachers, the usage of riddles motivates the competitive atmosphere in the classroom. The answers of the question: Do you use riddles in another teaching subjects, reveal that teachers also use riddles in other subjects, usually in the subject Introducing with Environment, rarely in Mathematics,

Art Education, and least in Music Education and Physical and Health Education. In addition, according to the results, riddles are main part of school shows and quizzes. The answers of the question: In what part of the class do you use riddles, show that all the teachers use riddles in the introductory or closing part of the class. This means that with riddles they stimulate the interest of students, acquaint them with the purpose of the class and evaluate the class, meaning riddles help in the realization of certain aims. This shows that riddles are never studied in the main part of the class, that is, they are never the aim of the class. It is well known that the project activities have multiple functions. The teachers were asked whether they are engaged with the students in preparing a project activity, which involve riddles. The answers suggest that only half of the teachers include students in projects with application of riddles. According to the teachers, the themes of the projects refer to “The live world around us”, “The Macedonian folk creativity”, “Healthy food” and “Transportation”. The answers of the question: Do you assign the students to create or compose a riddle on their own, show that 70 teachers use riddles in function of homework. Asked if they assign students to do independent research involving riddles, 70 teachers state that they engage students to do independent research and find riddles from other sources, for example family, literature for children, Internet etc. For the question: Do you think that the riddles are represented in a satisfactory amount, 40 of the teachers consider that riddles are present in adequate amount, 60 think that the number of riddles is not satisfactory. They were asked to list additional information about the way they can increase the number of riddles in the educational process. They state the following: change in the teaching curriculum, usage of works with didactic and speech games and usage of other sources of knowledge.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Macedonian language-teaching curriculum for first, second and third grade of the nine-year primary education show that riddles are part of the teaching curriculum. In the first grade, they are part of the domains Literature and Expressing and Creating. In the second grade, they are part of the domains Expressing and Creating, and in third grade of the domains Reading and Literature. With their usage, certain educational aims should be realized such as introduction to traditional speech games, stimulating creativity and new original works, development of memory, ability to read aloud, enrichment of vocabulary, etc. It is evident that the teaching curriculum heeds about the multiple aims that riddles have in the development of child’s personality. However, it is still unclear why riddles are not included in other programmatic areas, regarding that they fulfill the needs of students and realizes the complex aims anticipated with the teaching curriculum.

The analysis of Macedonian language course textbooks for first, second and third grade from the nine-year elementary education shows the following: in the textbook for first grade, (Ćamilova, 2008) riddles as folk works or works created by contemporary writers, are not included, although they are included in the teaching curriculum for first grade. In the textbook for first grade (Strezovska et al., 2008) there are only six riddles. In the textbook for second grade, (Ćamilova, 2008) there are ten riddles, they refer to objects, animals or animal products and a profession, without mentioning if they are folk or contemporary riddles. In the textbook for second grade, (Krtolica et al., 2008) there are only eight riddles. It is evident that the two textbooks are consistent with the teaching curriculum regarding the inclusion of riddles, but still, it has to be noted that the number is too small for the realization of the complex educational aims stated in the curriculum. In the textbook for third grade, (Nastoska & Sevdinska, 2008) there are fourteen riddles, folk and contemporary, and in the textbook (Spasovski et al., 2008) there are eleven, so the two textbooks are consistent with the teaching curriculum regarding the inclusion but still the number is too small, having in mind there are six classes per week. Hence, the conclusion that if riddles are not used in classes anticipated for other topics, for example, while analyzing text in order to get the main message, also in function of homework, project or investigating assignment, they could lose their pedagogic power. What can be noticed from the analysis is that the answers are referring to apparitions and objects from the environment, and that is positive. However, none of the riddles refers to new themes and things that are typical for the modern time. For example, there are no riddles where the answer is computer, etc. In addition, it is obvious that the textbooks do not contain an independent unit about riddles.

The results from the survey among the teachers that teach in the first cycle of the nine-year elementary education show the awareness of teachers about the importance of riddles in personality development. What surprises is the fact that despite the small number of riddles in textbook, they usually use them in everyday practice in order to motivate students towards exploring and creating. Knowing their pedagogic value, they use riddles usually in the introductory part of the class in order to acquaint the students with the aims of the class, to make the class interesting and relax the students, to stimulate thinking, investigating, concluding, in the end of the class to evaluate the whole class etc. Positive practice is that the teachers use riddles and realize educational aims in other subjects: Introducing with Environment, Art Education, Music Education, Physical and Health Education, and usually riddles are used to check the knowledge by organizing quizzes that encourage the complete spirit. A positive thing is that, despite the scarce presence of riddles in textbooks, by using other didactic means, oral traditions, magazines etc. as well as realizing project

activities and homework assignments related to riddles, teachers still manage to actualize them in everyday practice. Despite the positive practice, the research shows that teachers do not realize classes exclusively dedicated to riddles, and that illustrates the need for changes in the flow and articulation of the class, with the goal to achieve complex educational aims anticipated with the teaching curriculum. The results of this research can be of great importance for the experts who prepare the curriculums, for the people that write the Macedonian language textbooks, a stimulus for the teachers to use riddles in everyday practice, in favor of, of course, the students.

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