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BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SERBIA: MODELS AND PERSPECTIVES

Савремене тенденције у политици учења страних језика у Европи и свету нуде двојезичност у образовним системима као један од основних начела који као исход имају друштвени склад, јединство, равноправност, толеранцију и укидање сваке врсте језичке, културне и друштвене сегрегације. Двојезичност у образовним системима подразумева све облике увођења страних језика у образовне системе на различитим нивоима образовања, али и примену овог принципа на образовање мањинских заједница.

У раду се говори о променама законских одредби којима се дефинише двојезична настава у Србији, критички се посматрају постојеће стање и модели у употреби и нуде се могућа решења за примену нових облика наставе.

Кључне речи: двојезична настава, страни језици, мањински језици, образовни систем Србије.

1. Plurilingualism in the educational system of Serbia

Contemporary tendencies in the policy of foreign language learning in Europe and the world have established plurilingualism in educational systems as one of the elementary principles that result in social order, unity, equality, tolerance and the eradication of any and all language, cultural or social segregation (Ignjačević, 2003; Filipović, 2006; Filipović & Durbaba, 2014).

Plurilingualism in educational systems includes all forms of foreign language inclusion into educational systems on different levels of education, but also the application of this principle in the education of minority communities.

The advantages of bilingual/plurilingual education are reflected in the expansion of language competence of students in both the mother tongue and the foreign language, enhancement of the ability to select, analyze and solve problems, development of creativity and sense of communication, spreading knowledge equally in all languages in teaching, greater self respect, development of a self confident personality with a commanding knowledge of the language of his surroundings and foreign languages, flexibility and adaptability, confidence in social interactions, development of the ability for interpersonal contact, establishment of strong connections with the language social and teaching environment in a broader sense, and the creation of a multicultural stance and possession of an “experience of two language worlds” (Baker, 2000).

Plurilingual education unequivocally facilitates information flow and exchange in the broadest sense, from family, community, workplace, to international contacts in the European and global context, the transfer of academic knowledge, the spirit of international cooperation, permeation of the educational systems of Serbia and European countries, and the education of a ready, open-minded citizen with an expressed tolerance and a need for social harmony.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia has recognized the devotion to bilingual/plurilingual education and it has been supporting the establishment and spreading of this form of education in Serbia since 1996. The right to education in the mother tongue for members of national minorities is regulated by general and special laws (Stojanović, 2005). The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages was ratified by the Parliament of SCG on the 21st of December of 2005. It came into force on the 1st of June of the year 2006.

Article 43 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages relates to the education in minority languages: “Everyone has the right to education. Primary education is compulsory. Member States are obliged to provide free primary education. Establishment of schools and universities shall be regulated by the laws of the Member States”.

In Article 71 of the new Constitution of Serbia, adopted in late 2006, equal rights to education are guaranteed to all citizens within the paragraph “The right to education”: “Everyone shall have the right to education. Primary education is mandatory and free, whereas secondary education is

free. All citizens shall have access under equal conditions to higher education. The Republic of Serbia shall provide for free tertiary education to successful and talented students of lower property status in accordance with the law. Establishment of schools and universities shall be regulated by the law.”

In addition to the above laws regulating the right to education of minority community members, the following institutions also deal with the education of this category of citizens: The National Council of National Minorities (Article 19, paragraph 7 of the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, “Official Gazette SRJ”, no. 11/02), the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the Provincial Secretariat for Education and Culture, the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina, the Council for National Minorities of the Republic of Serbia, etc. International institutions such as the Council of Europe and the office of this organization in Belgrade, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and many others, also provide support.

The education of all citizens in the Republic of Serbia (Article 12 of the Law on Primary Education and Article 5 of the Law on Secondary Education) is carried out through the following forms: 1. education in the mother tongue; 2. bilingual education; 3. education in Serbian language with the possibility of choosing an elective course mother tongue with elements of national culture. The most common forms of instruction are in mother tongue and in Serbian language with the possibility of opting for an elective course dealing with the corresponding minority’s mother tongue and elements of national culture. Bilingual education in the minority and Serbian language is rarely used as a form of teaching for a number of reasons related to the interests of students and parents, teacher education, the level of knowledge of both languages in teaching, organizational and political problems etc.

2. Bilingual education – towards a new curriculum

Although bilingual education in Serbian, minority and foreign languages started as early as in 2004 in Serbia (Vučo, 2004, 2005, 2014), there was no adequate legislation that would regulate this type of teaching.

It was only during 2016 that the rulebook on more specific conditions for the implementation of this type of teaching (hereinafter referred to as the Rulebook) was adopted, defining the national curriculum for bilingual education for all languages that participate in the teaching process. Bilingual implementation of the educational work programs (bilingual education) is a form of educational work in which the teaching is conducted in two languages. In the educational system of the Republic of Serbia bilingual education can take place in the following languages: Serbian, a minority language and a foreign language. The necessity to regulate this domain of the educational system was stated immediately upon its introduction. The first *Commission for the Development of Bilingual Education* was formed shortly after the introduction of bilingual education in 2005, but had no influence on the adoption of a national curriculum for this type of teaching which was supposed to contribute to solving the problems related to working conditions, competences and the status of teachers, the language competences of students, willingness of schools and local communities, etc. The external evaluation which should have been carried out was not, and as a result the schools implemented bilingual education with no clear context or support from the relevant institutions and local administrations. The sustainability of this type of teaching, which was more or less successful, was largely based upon the enthusiasm of teachers and principals, following the interests of parents and students. In mid-2014, a Working Group was set up to discuss the problems of bilingual education with the aim of providing a national curriculum for the implementation of bilingual teaching throughout the document, the Rulebook on the work of schools conducting bilingual teaching. The adoption of the Rulebook has also initiated other activities of the Ministry aimed at regulating this type of teaching that has spread, during a period of more than ten years, from the only bilingual French-Serbian and Serbian-Italian section of the Third Belgrade Gymnasium, to over eighty sections in all parts of Serbia in Serbian, minority and foreign languages (English, French, Italian, German and Russian). Further reactions in the field of initial and continuing teacher education that would identify new needs of contemporary language policy are expected.

Upon the adoption of the Rulebook, the *Commission for verifying compliance with the conditions for implementing bilingual teaching* in

schools in the Republic of Serbia was formed in 2016 by the decision of the Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development. This commission is tasked with implementing the provisions of the Rulebook, by managing practical problems of applying the provisions related to bilingual education, i.e. the fulfillment of conditions for obtaining or renewing licenses for bilingual education. The commission consists of representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Provincial Secretariat for Education of Vojvodina, the Institute for the Advancement of Education, the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Novi Sad and the National Education Council.

The Rulebook has essentially set up a new curricular framework of bilingual education in Serbia. It determines detailed conditions for bilingual implementation of the educational work program (i.e. bilingual education) in Serbian, minority and a foreign languages.

The Rulebook envisages a procedure by which schools can submit a request for approval to conduct bilingual teaching to the Ministry. Schools (primary and secondary) must submit requests to the Ministry by the 1st of December of current year for the following school year in which the implementation of bilingual education is supposed to begin. In addition to this, schools are also obliged to submit a decision of managing authorities on the introduction of bilingual teaching, a study and evidence of compliance with the conditions stipulated in the Rulebook. The conditions for the realization of bilingual teaching may refer to the entry levels of students participating in bilingual classes, teaching staff and any other teaching conditions. The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of bilingual teaching are stipulated in the Rulebook.

The Rulebook also defines the entry grade for bilingual instruction. The implementation of bilingual teaching can begin in the sixth or in the seventh grade of primary school, and the first year of secondary school.

For all students who enter the system of bilingual education, it is necessary to organize an entrance exam to test their knowledge of language, i.e. whether they have the desired level of language proficiency.

The Rulebook also defines the entry levels of language competence in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for

Languages for students who wish to continue their education in bilingual classes: language proficiency level for the sixth grade is A1.1, A 1.2 for the seventh grade and A2 for the first year of secondary or vocational school.

The format of testing language proficiency level of future students is also determined by the Rulebook, through which four language skills are assessed (reading, listening, writing and speaking) in order to get more objective information on the level of knowledge of future participants in bilingual education.

Furthermore, the Rulebook also defines the manner in which the assessment will be carried out: the language proficiency test for primary schools is prepared and conducted by the Expert Council for the field of the subject dealing with the corresponding target language, and the language proficiency test for gymnasiums and vocational schools is carried out in accordance with the by-law regulating the enrollment of students in secondary schools.

In addition to defining the age at which one may start attending bilingual classes and determining entry levels, the Rulebook defines the conditions related to the qualifications of the teachers intending to participate in the implementation of bilingual teaching. The consent of teachers for participating in bilingual education is above all required and their acceptance of all obligations stipulated in the conditions, which are determined. The level of linguistic competence of teachers is specified and is proven by presenting the relevant language proficiency certificates. The modalities of the teaching process are also specified. It is with utmost pleasure that we ascertain that a modern approach to bilingual teaching is applied, which implies different models of carrying out this type of teaching as well as the certificates required for conducting teaching. Instruction can be carried out by the subject teacher, whose knowledge of the target foreign language in the first school year of the implementation of bilingual teaching should be at least at the level of B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Teaching can also be conducted by a subject teacher who was educated in a foreign language of bilingual teaching, which he/she can prove by presenting a public document (certificate or teacher's diploma on completion of a certain level of education, a minimum being completion of secondary school). Bilingual teaching can be

carried out through joint efforts of a subject teacher (with the knowledge of a foreign language at the level of B1) and a teacher of a certain foreign language who can work together, as well as a foreign language instructor, in accordance with the law and international agreements. This opens the possibility to combine the models of bilingual education that are in line with modern approaches used in the areas with a long tradition of conducting this type of teaching (Vučo, 2006).

The Rulebook on the implementation of bilingual teaching also determines mandatory monitoring and evaluation of the quality of bilingual teaching, ensuring the quality of implementing this type of teaching in schools, in accordance with the law regulating the basis of the educational system and the by-law regulating the evaluation of the quality of work of institutions. Permanent monitoring of bilingual teaching is foreseen as well. The school has an obligation to submit an annual report to the Ministry, which provides an insight into the implementation of bilingual education.

In order to enter a system of bilingual education, schools must prepare adequately, as described in the study submitted to the Commission within the given deadline. The study includes the reasons and justification for the introduction of bilingual teaching, detailed information about the school, elaborate information on bilingual teaching (goals and outcomes of implementing bilingual education, the grade in which bilingual education is introduced or is yet to be introduced, the number of sections for which the school is planning to introduce or where it has already introduced bilingual teaching, the number of students interested in or already attending bilingual classes, the development plan for bilingual education within the school). The study contains a detailed description of the modalities of the ways of implementing bilingual teaching to the extent of minimum 30% and maximum 45% of the total annual number of classes of these subjects conducted in the foreign language, without counting the number classes of Foreign language as a subject. Modern methods, including non-linguistic content learning in foreign language (Content and language integrated learning - CLIL), are recommended as ways of conveying chosen topics from certain subjects in foreign language. The school is also required to offer, within its study, a description of existing conditions in the school, as well as measures for the sustainability of bilingual teaching, including the expected support of local government, and other legal entities or individuals.

3. New problems - old problems

Although the Rulebook has paved the way to a new curriculum of bilingual education in Serbia, implementers of teaching practices are confronted with new problems, in addition to the old ones which have characterized this type of teaching until now (Vučo, 2014)

The spread of different modalities of bilingual education, including the CLIL, will represent one of the problems. The obstacles in this regard may be detected in rigid legal provisions and a lack of opportunities to go outside the statutory provisions relating to the curriculum, number of classes, the possibilities of joint work of the teachers of two different subjects within the classroom and the like.

The lack of visibility of bilingual education in official documents such as diplomas, certificates, etc. is also a problem. Students attend classes in two languages, but there is no mention in their documents whatsoever that the teaching of certain subjects was carried out in a foreign language, hence their efforts and competences remain invisible and unrecognized in their future professional life and education.

The weak recognition of the importance of the teachers' role in bilingual education represents an immense and still unsolved obstacle. Not even the Rulebook, defined in a curricular framework and representing a major step forward in the implementation of bilingual education, recognizes the essential role of teachers and the importance of their commitment and dedication to the tasks of bilingual education. Significant investment in their own professional development in numerous directions, including perfecting a foreign language, application of new methods and motivating themselves, colleagues and students, is not acknowledged by granting them at least some benefits that would, even in the slightest degree, represent a sign of recognition, e.g. a smaller number of classes, additional financial incentives, career advancement, etc. The conditions for the implementation of bilingual teaching in the part relating to the obligations of teachers indicate serious deficiencies in initial teacher education that does not prepare them for new opportunities and challenges in a school system undergoing modernization. Examples of better practice include certain master's study programs at some teachers' colleges dealing with CLIL or

intercultural elements in the teaching of foreign languages and foreign language teaching modules for the first cycle offered by some teacher training colleges.

The position of the representatives of national minorities not allowing minority languages to be equally represented as languages of instruction in the Rulebook, although the text of the Rulebook has envisaged this, is a particular problem. In the final version of the Rulebook the positions of one part of the Working Group that the *Rulebook on more specific conditions for the implementation of bilingual teaching* should relate both to the teaching of minority languages and to the teaching of the Serbian language, so that the Rulebook would apply to bilingual instruction in foreign languages and Serbian and foreign languages and minority languages, were not supported. In connection with this problem, during the work on drafting the Rulebook, the observation was made that minority languages would be threatened by this type of instruction, considering that parents may prefer to opt for this type of teaching as it would allow students a larger field of integration into the local community, but, on the other hand, this could reflect negatively on their relationship to the native minority language and its culture, affect their national identity, and, in the longer run, the existing system of teaching, teachers' employment, financing of minority communities at all levels, etc. In relation to this issue, it was indicated that the Commission does not have sufficient competence and that a unified position of the national councils of national minorities is required in order to make decisions. In our opinion, such a decision is discriminatory on multiple levels as it affects, on the one hand, a minority population interested in equal or nearly equal development of language competences in both their mother tongue and the language of their surroundings, and, on the other hand, it prevents students belonging to the majority population from developing their language competence in the minority language. Both forms of discrimination are inconsistent with the tendencies of establishing any kind of balance or equality in multilingual areas.

4. Conclusion

Many years of experience in the design, implementation and now the legal regulation of bilingual education in Serbia has taught us that it is

precisely on the example of introducing this type of teaching in the Serbian educational system that the principle of modern language policy is affirmed, conveying the assertion that only the type of instruction that has support from below, schools, parents, teachers, students and local communities can persist in a sustainable manner. Support from below should be expressed through legal provisions that encourage and acknowledge the implementation of modern and innovative tendencies within the educational system, based on the needs of participants in the educational process. Despite the good example of support from above, the recently adopted Rulebook on more specific conditions for the implementation of bilingual teaching, which regulates bilingual teaching in Serbian, minority and foreign languages in the Republic of Serbia, the questions related to financial problems remain open, as do those advocated by the representatives of minority communities who feel that their rights can be threatened by this type of teaching. Such positions do not recognize the benefits of plurilingualism for the wider community, and are bringing us back to the state of segregation as a result of political shortsightedness, not recognizing the advantages of mixed-classes that can be attended by both the minority and majority population and the benefits that would lead to learning and adopting all languages in the region.

Although imperfect, this by-law represents a significant step forward in the organization and modernization of the educational system of the Republic of Serbia.

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Abstract

Contemporary tendencies in the policy of foreign language learning in Europe and the world identify multilingualism in educational systems as one of the elementary principles that result in social stability, unity, equality, tolerance and the eradication of any and all language, cultural or social segregation. Multilingualism in educational systems includes all forms of foreign language inclusion into educational systems on different levels of education, but also the application of this principle in the education of minority communities.

The advantages of bilingual education are reflected in the expansion of language competence of students in the mother tongue and the foreign/minority/national language, enhancement of the ability to select, analyze and solve problems, development of creativity and sense for communication, spreading knowledge equally in all languages in teaching. Bilingual education develops greater self respect, contributes to building a self confident personality with a commanding knowledge of the language of one's surroundings and foreign languages. The process of bilingual education contributes to flexibility and adaptability, confidence in social interactions, development of the ability for interpersonal contact, establishment of strong connections with the language social and teaching environment in a broader sense, and the creation of a multicultural stance and possession of capacities to live in two different language worlds. Bilingual education unequivocally facilitates information flow and exchange in the broadest sense, from family, community, workplace, to international contacts in the European and global context, the transfer of academic knowledge, the spirit of international cooperation, permeation of the educational systems of Serbia and European countries, and the education of a ready, open-minded citizen with an expressed tolerance and a need for social harmony.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological advancement has demonstrated a commitment to bilingual education and has been supporting the establishment and expansion of this form of education in Serbia since 1996.

In this work, the legal possibilities that define multilingual education in Serbia are highlighted, the current state and models in use are critically analyzed, and possible solutions for the application of new forms of teaching are provided.

Keywords: bilingual education, foreign languages, minority languages, educational system of Serbia.

Biographical statement

JULIJANA VUČO, PhD, is a Full Professor of Italian and Educational Linguistics at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. Her research interests are in the areas of Italian linguistics, Educational

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ALEKSANDRA BEGOVIĆ was born on 17 July 1964. She studied German language and literature at the University of Belgrade and spent one year at the Humboldt University of Berlin. She worked for seven years as a German language teacher in primary and secondary schools. From 1996 until 2005 she worked as an adviser for foreign and national minority languages in the Ministry of Education, Department for Curriculum Development, Teacher Training and Textbook Licensing. Since 2005 she has been working at the Institute for the Improvement of Education, a Government-funded institution which was tasked with performing all curriculum and textbook-related jobs. She has been involved in the activities related to the reform of the education system in Serbia, especially in the field of curriculum, based on the principles of the European Framework for modern languages. She took part in many working groups formulating important documents regulating language policy (early beginning of foreign language learning, conditions for licensed foreign language teachers, introduction of CLIL, foreign language standards, recommendations for

the implementation of foreign language curriculum, teacher trainer training). She has taken part in many seminars and conferences in Serbia and abroad, mostly in German speaking countries. She is a member of many associations such as the Association for Foreign Languages and Literature of Serbia (vice president) and Association of German Teachers of Serbia. Since 2013 she has been acting as a nominated person in the European Centre for Modern Languages. She is a German language textbook author for secondary education.

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