

## **Teachers and pre-school teachers facing the challenge of the Croatian dialectal diversity**

The three Croatian dialects – Chakavian, Shtokavian and Kajkavian – are very much present in everyday communication in Croatia. Croatian speakers predominantly use their dialect of origin in their daily lives, while children acquire it as their first idiom.

As they step out of their family environment, and especially as they start their pre-school and primary education, all Croatian language speakers encounter and begin to master the standard Croatian language. They acquire it already in the kindergarten and systematically start to learn it in the first grade of primary school. This way the two linguistic codes, the dialect and the standard, intertwine in every speaker's linguistic system; they mix and affect one another. In other words, most Croatian language speakers master the Croatian language in the context of vertical bilingualism. In this complex communication environment teachers and pre-school teachers need to establish good relationship with the children and their parents, to stimulate the children to master the standard Croatian language as well as to cherish their idiom, their dialect of origin. This can be a difficult and challenging task, especially in the language communities that a teacher or a pre-school teacher is not well acquainted with.

Thus, this paper contemplates some challenges teachers and pre-school teachers are faced with when working within the described context of linguistic complexity, their readiness to face such a task as well as their awareness of the dialectal diversity of the Croatian language and the actual linguistic reality in various parts of the country – which are all potential places where teachers and pre-school teachers might find employment. To tackle the mentioned issues, a questionnaire was administered to the students of three study programmes at the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Zagreb: pre-school teacher education study programme, primary teacher education study programme and primary teacher education study programme with English/German. The goal was to investigate their awareness of the Croatian dialectal diversity present in various parts of the country. The results show that their overall knowledge on the idioms used in different parts of Croatia, Chakavian in particular, is below all expectations.

**Keywords:** Croatian dialectal diversity, pre-school teacher, teacher