

**SOME ELEMENTS OF THE LANGUAGE OF NEW
MEDIA IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' WRITTEN
ASSIGNMENTS**

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ABSTRACT:

With the advent of the new media and the development of Web 2.0 tools, there was a mediatization of everyday life that is associated with the formation of the characteristic language in the new media services. This language represents hybridization of written and oral forms, and Crystal (2006) calls it Netspeak. Nowadays communication via Internet and the mobile phone has become an indispensable part of modern life, especially of young people. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the assessment of 8th grade students about the representation of certain elements of the language of new media in their writings written at school and for school purposes and in their texts written in their leisure time, i.e.: only uppercase letters, lowercase letters, mixed letters, exclamation marks and the use of symbols of laughter (smiles), syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without auxiliary verbs, the use of Croatian aorist and imperfekt rather than perfekt tenses, the use of dialectal expressions, vulgarisms and blasphemes. As an instrument a questionnaire was used. It related to the use of elements of the language of new media in students' school work as well as those in their leisure activities (*Facebook*, SMS messages / *Viber*, *WhatsApp* /). Students estimated the frequencies of their use for each item of the questionnaire on a 5-point Likert- type scale. Results of this study have shown that most 8th grade students never or very rarely use the elements of the language of new media in their school writings, while at the same time they use them very often or always only when they write in the new media in their leisure time. So writing in the new media differs from traditional texts because of language economy and technological possibilities on one hand, as well as limitations on the other.

Key words: language of the new media, 8th grade students' written assignments, lowercase and uppercase letters, omission of subjects and auxiliary verbs, dialectisms, vulgarisms

INTRODUCTION

Today's children are growing up in the world of information-communication technologies and in the world of the screen. Computers and the Internet as well as mobile phones are the media that appear in all segments of the modern society. Digital media allow young people to

communicate privately, which is largely not subject to parental or teacher control, so the role of the media is particularly important at the time of adolescence when young people spend most of their free time in front of screens. Many research studies in the world as well as in Croatia (Pavièiæ i Šuriiæ, 2014; Rogulj, 2014; Filipan-Žigniiæ et al., 2012, 2015, 2016; Dürscheid et al. 2010) have noted the trend of increased use of new media (computers, internet and mobile phones), as well as of the time that the young people spend on them. That new sudden expansion of computer media in the information and communication technologies appeared at the beginning of the third millennium with the development of Web 2.0 tools and the constant addition of new services. Through the mediation of everyday life, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has emerged, which according to Crystal (2006), has led to social and linguistic revolution. The development and dissemination of the new media has influenced the organization of interpersonal relations, led to new ways of communication and introduced changes in the language itself and created new media discourses (Graniæ, 2006).

Such a language characteristic of various online services is called *Netspeak* (Crystal, 2006), and it features both speech and script elements. The elements of oral speech that are otherwise typical of the free style of oral communication and conversational style have started to appear on *Facebook*, in SMS, *Twitter* and other services. Already in 2001, Storrer called such texts of Internet services “typed speech”. It can actually be established that communication by means of new media has led to unclear boundaries between the written and the oral language. In the same sense, Koch and Österreicher (1994) describe the two concepts of interaction as the conceptual literacy and the conceptual orality.

One of the most popular social networks on the Internet is *Facebook*, has been designed by its founder Zuckerberg for communication, as well as for posting, sharing and browsing information, posting photographs, and last but not least, for playing games. Its popularity can of course be testified by the fact that *Facebook* has now reached two billion users.

Such a large spread of *Facebook* has of course also been affected by today’s smart mobile phones because modern mobile phones offer numerous possibilities with the most important ongoing Internet connection so that today children and young people can easily send SMS messages via their mobile phones, as well as search the Internet or be on *Facebook* and send messages or edit their status, etc. from their mobile phones.

A significant contribution to language research in online services has been provided by Crystal. He has given a detailed analysis of the

language on the Internet in the books *Language and the Internet* (2006) and *Internet Linguistics* (2011) as well as in scientific articles (2008) with an emphasis on English as a global language. Along with Dürscheid (2010, 2012, 2016) and Crystal, the language of the new media (SMS and social networks), was dealt by Bader (2002), Pérez-Sabater (2012), König and Bahlo (2014). They have provided a detailed analysis of this type of communication.

With their project, *Schreibkompetenz und neue Medien*, Dürscheid et.al. (2010) have made a significant contribution to the research of youth literacy in Switzerland. They have concluded that writing in the new media does not negatively affect the literacy of young Swiss people. Schlobinski (2002) and Keus and Corr (2013) have also written about the theme of the language of the youth as a variety of language. They have also pointed out that writing in the new media does not have a negative influence on the literacy of young people.

Research studies of the new media have been less common in Croatia than in the rest of the world.

In Croatia, the language of new media has been investigated by Filipan-Žigniæ (2012) in her book *Language of the new media*, as well as in many scientific research studies (2015, 2016 et al.), where she, either as author or co-author, analyses the fundamental features of the language of new media as well as the modes of writing of young people (grammar school students) with regard to the representation of the elements of language of new media.

The results of her as well as of the aforementioned research studies of the language used on the social network *Facebook* and of the SMS messages have confirmed Crystal's (2006) claim that computer-mediated communication (CMC) has led not only to social, but also to language revolution. Namely, changes have occurred at all language levels: spelling, graphostylistic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and lexical and they have all been described in detail by Filipan-Žigniæ (2012).

Thus several new characteristic elements of this new media mode of writing have occurred. They include: use of only lowercase letters, use of only capital letter or mixed letters, repetition of punctuation marks, media-related errors, use of emoticons, exclamation marks, abbreviations, omission of auxiliary verbs, use of *aorist* and *imperfekt* tenses instead of the *perfect* tense, use of English loan words, dialectal expressions, vulgarisms and profanities, etc., all of them most often being a result of linguistic economics and technological limitations (Filipan-Žigniæ, 2012).

The increase in the number of abbreviations has been influenced by convenience and the limited space of SMS messages, but Bieswagner

(2007) points out that in addition to them there have also been other motives, such as the desire to manifest humour, which is an important incentive to use abbreviations in SMS messages. A sense of humour can be found in many titles of papers and books dealing with SMS-messages with the aim of singling out language creativity as a characteristic feature of that kind of discourse (*I h8 txt msgs* /Humphrys 2007/; *2b or not 2b* /Crystal 2008/; *2 abbrevi8 or not 2 abbrevi8...* /Bieswanger 2007/; *(. . .)/ dont 4get 2 txt me plz!...* /Yusuf et al. 2016/; *Btw, tnx što me lajkaš! Lol.:*) /Vlasteliæ i Vrbanac 2014).

Žic Fuchs & Tuđman Vukoviæ (2013), as well as Vrsaljko & Ljubimir (2013), and Pavlièeviæ-Franiæ (2011) have dealt with the analysis of the language of SMS-messages and with the communication on social networks in Croatia. They have pointed to the problem of deviation from the orthographic norm in young people and emphasized the need for a thorough approach to this issue. The problem of deviations from the language norms as well as of the massive entry of English loan words into the standard Croatian language has also been discussed by Opaèiæ (2012).

AIM, HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this study was to examine the assessments of 8th grade primary school students about the representation of certain elements of the language of new media in their writings written at school and for school purposes and in their texts written in their leisure time, i.e.: only uppercase letters, lowercase letters, mixed letters, exclamation marks and the use of symbols of laughter (smiles), syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without auxiliary verbs, the use of Croatian *aorist* and *imperfekt* rather than *perfekt* tenses, the use of dialectal expressions, vulgarisms and blasphemes.

For this purpose the following hypotheses have been set:

H1: Students estimate that they rarely use the elements of the language of new media in their written works at school and for school purposes (only uppercase letters, lowercase letters, mixed letters, exclamation marks and the use of symbols of laughter, syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without auxiliary verbs, the use of Croatian *aorist* and *imperfekt* rather than *perfekt* tenses, the use of dialectal expressions, vulgarisms and blasphemes).

H2: Students estimate that they often use elements of the language of new media in their texts written in their leisure time (only uppercase letters, lowercase letters, mixed letters, exclamation marks and the use of symbols of laughter, syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without

auxiliary verbs, the use of Croatian *aorist* and *imperfekt* rather than *perfekt* tenses, the use of dialectal expressions, vulgarisms and blasphemes).

H3: The language of new media does not have a negative influence on the literacy of primary school students.

The sample consisted of 56 (N=56) 8th grade students from the Primary School “Ivan Benkoviæ” in Dugo Selo (Croatia). They filled in the survey questionnaire that had been developed by Filipan-Žigniaè et al., 2015 (based on the questionnaire designed by Dürscheid et al. 2010), concerning the use of the elements of the new media language in school writings and for school purposes as well as in texts written in new media in their free time: on *Facebook*, in chatrooms, forums and SMS messages (*Viber*, *WhatsApp* ...) for elementary school students.

In the survey questionnaire, along with socio-demographic data, the 8th grade pupils had to circle the frequency of their use of the elements of language of new media on a 5-point Likert scale (never, very rarely, sometimes, very often, always). They had to do it for each item of the questionnaire. The items referred to students' writings written at school for school purposes as well as to texts written in new media in their leisure time.

The elements of the language of new media, i.e. the individual items of the questionnaire were the following: *abbreviations, emoticons, all capital letters, lowercase letters, mixed letters, multiple punctuation marks, iconic characters, exclamation marks and smiles, syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without auxiliary verbs, dialectal expressions, vulgarisms and anglicisms*. All of them were not analysed in this article because of the lack of space.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

3.1. All Capital Letters

Results of our research conducted on 56 grade 8 students related to the use of the elements of the language of new media in texts written at school and for school purposes, as well as in the texts written in the new media on *Facebook*, in chatrooms, forums and SMS messages (*Viber*, *WhatsApp* ...) in free time have shown the following: 63% of the students say that in the texts written at school or for school purposes they never write only by using uppercase letters, 25% of the students write them only rarely, and 13% of the students sometimes, whereas there was no single student who uses all capital letters very often or always when writing at school and for school purposes. It is assumed that students who at school and for school rarely or sometimes write by using all the capital letters do so in *PowerPoint* presentations, posters, etc. to highlight their titles or important terms in their works or thank the audience for their attention. In

the texts written in leisure time activities, all capital letters are used always by 7% of the students, very often by 18% of the students, sometimes by 29%, very rarely by 25%, whereas 20% of the students never write by using only capital letters in their writings written during their free time. It can be concluded here that 8th grade students write more often by using only all capital letters in texts written in their free time than in the texts written at school, but this element of the language of new media is not widely represented, especially if compared to writing only in lowercase letters, which is illustrated in Figure 2.

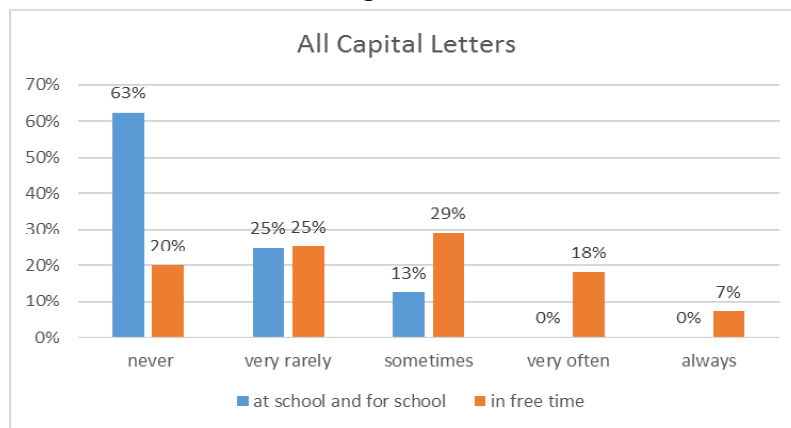


Figure 1. Use of all capital letters in the texts written at school and for school purposes and in texts written in the new media in free time

3.2. Only Lowercase Letters

The results indicate that 68% of the 8th grade students never write by using only lowercase letters when writing texts at school or for school purposes, but that they always obey the rules of the Croatian orthography. However, 14% of the students claim that at school and for school purposes they write by using only lowercase letters, 7% use them sometimes, 5% very often and another 5%, (or three students) have claimed that at school they write by using only lowercase letters, which would mean that they do not apply the rules of the Croatian orthography at all. In this case, this means that four students write at school only by using small letters, three students very often, and three students always. This may be an example of a misunderstood question, or an example of a hasty or unpremeditated answer, but it can also be evidence of the direct negative influence of the writing in new media on the writing at school and for school purposes among 8th grade primary school students. Namely, 42% of the 8th grade students write in leisure time only in lowercase letters, and 22% of them very often. 15% of the students write sometimes in leisure time only by

using lowercase letter and 15% very rarely. Only 7% of the students in the sample, i.e. only four students adhere to the spelling rules of the Croatian language for writing in capital letters and never write only in lowercase letters when writing text messages or communicating on social networks.

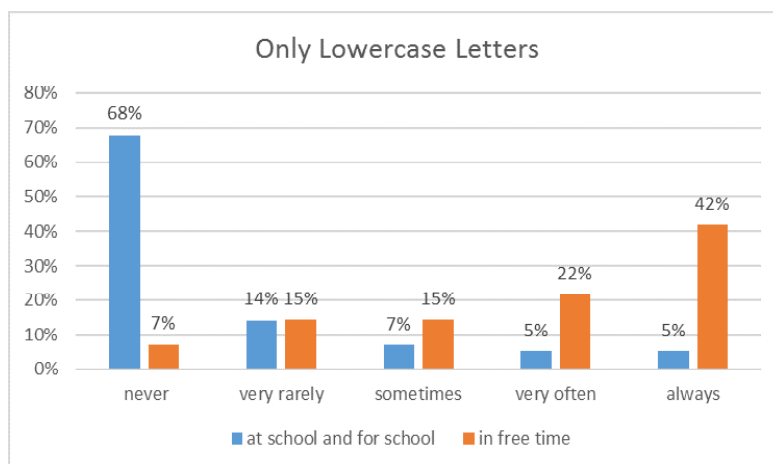


Figure 2. Use of only lowercase letters in the texts written at school and for school purposes and in the texts written in the new media in free time

3.3. Mixed Letters

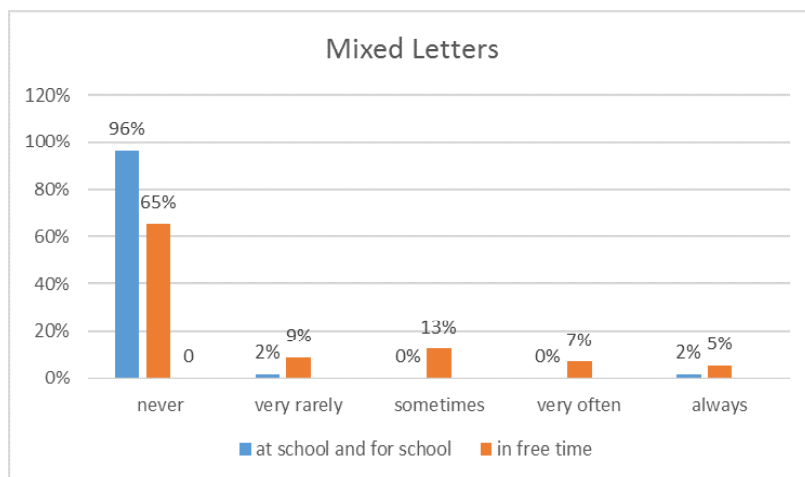


Figure 3. Use of mixed letters in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the texts written in the new media in free time

The results of this research show that mixed letters, as an element of the language of new media, are the least represented, both in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the textbooks written in students' free time as well as that in this element there is almost no influence of the writing in the texts written in new media on the writings written at school and for school purposes. Namely, 96% of the 8th grade students never write in mixed letters at school, and only one student (2%) estimates that they write by using mixed letters very rarely, and one student (2%) uses them always. For this latter assessment, it is almost certain that this is an example of a misunderstood question or a hasty and unpremeditated answer. Even in free time texts, 65% of the students never write in mixed letters, whereas 9% of them write them very rarely, 13% sometimes, 7% very often, and 5% always. It is assumed that the use of this element of the language of new media comes in cases of the wrong pressure to use the option of writing in capital letters, and of the neglect to erase and correct this error, either because of speed, neglect or lack of knowledge.

3.4. Exclamation Marks and Symbols of Laughter (Smiles)

57% of the students in our sample never use exclamation marks and symbols of laughter, 23% of the students use them rarely, 5% use them sometimes, 7% very often and 7% always in texts written at school or for school purposes. On the other hand, 40% of the 8th grade students always use exclamation marks and symbols of laughter in the texts written in new media in their leisure time activities: *Facebook*, chatrooms, forum and SMS messages (*Viber, WhatsApp...*). In the same kind of texts, 29% of the students use them very often, 11% sometimes, 4% of the students never and 23% very often. It can be concluded that their use depends on the personality, i.e. the character of the person and the time needed to write the message.

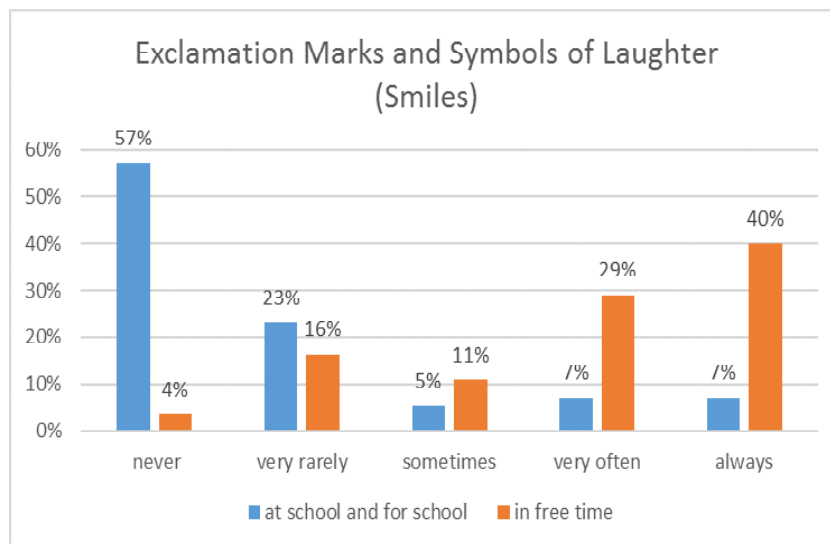


Figure 4. Use of exclamation marks and smiles in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the texts written in the new media in free time

3.5. Syntagmas without a Subject

Syntagmas without a subject at school and for school purposes are never used by 56% of the surveyed students, 27% use them rarely, 11% use them sometimes, 5% very often, whereas there is no single student in the sample who uses them always. At the same time, 15% of the 8th grade students use the same kind of syntagmas always, 11% very often, 27% sometimes, 16% rarely in the texts written in the new media in free time: i.e. on *Facebook*, in chatrooms, forums and SMS messages (*Viber*, *WhatsApp* ...). Even here the highest percentage, 31% of the students, never use syntagmas without a subject during their leisure time activities.

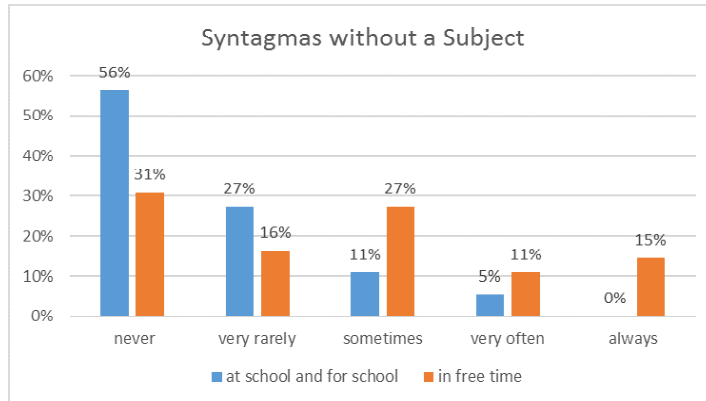


Figure 5. Use of syntagmas without a subject in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the texts written in the new media in free time

3.6. Syntagmas without an Auxiliary Verb

Syntagmas without an auxiliary verb are even more rarely used than syntagmas without a subject, both at school and in leisure time. Syntagmas without an auxiliary verb are never used at school by 84% of the students in the sample and by 38% of them in leisure time. They are used at school or for school purposes very rarely by 9% of the students, sometimes by 5%, and very often by 2% , whereas there is no single student who uses them always. In the texts written in students' free time, syntagmas without an auxiliary verb are rarely used by 16% of the 8th graders, by 22% of them rarely, by 11% very rarely and by 13 % of them always.

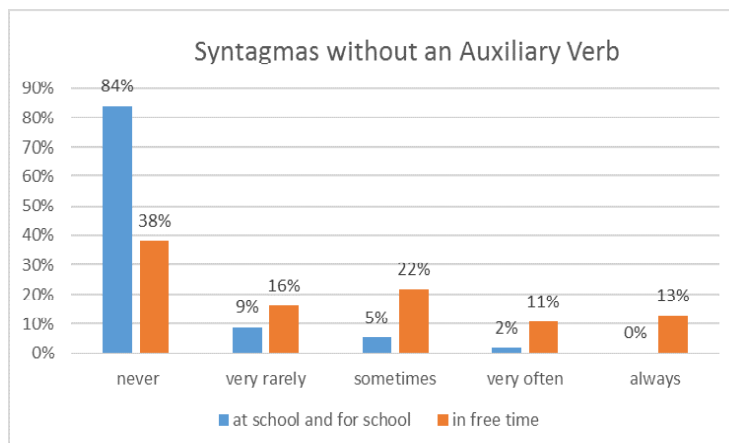


Figure 6. Use of syntagmas without an auxiliary verb in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the texts written in the new media in free time

3.7. *Aorist and Imperfekt Tenses instead of Perfekt*

Results of this current research study have shown that *aorist* and *imperfekt* tenses are used instead of the *perfekt* tense at school and for school purposes never by 61% of the surveyed students, very rarely by 29% of them, sometimes by 9%, very often by 2%, whereas there is no student who would consequently use them always. In the texts written in the new media in students' free time, on *Facebook*, in chatrooms, forums and SMS messages (*Viber, WhatsApp...*) *aorist* and *imperfekt* tenses are used instead of the *perfekt* tense always by 7% of the students, very often by 4% of them, never by 15%, very rarely by 22%, whereas as many as 53% of the students in the sample never use this element of the language of new media.

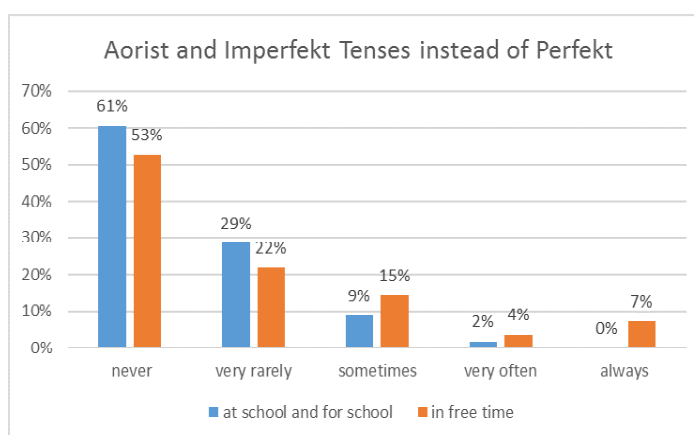


Figure 7. Use of *aorist* and *imperfekt* instead of *perfekt* in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well in the texts written in the new media in free time

3.8. *Dialectal Expressions*

It should be noted here that this research study was conducted in the Primary School "Ivan Benkoviæ" in Dugo Selo in the County of Zagreb. The town of Dugo Selo, situated 10 km east of Zagreb, originally belongs to the Kajkavian dialect, but during the Homeland War a large number of inhabitants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from other parts of the Republic of Croatia arrived there and brought their dialects, which is the main reason why Kajkavian words are more rarely heard there. The results of the use of dialectal expressions at school and for school purposes are the following: 68% of the 8th graders never use them, 20% very rarely,

4% sometimes, 7% very rarely and 2% (one student) always. In the texts written in their free time, 24% of the students use them always, 33% very often, 20% sometimes, 9% very rarely and 15% never.

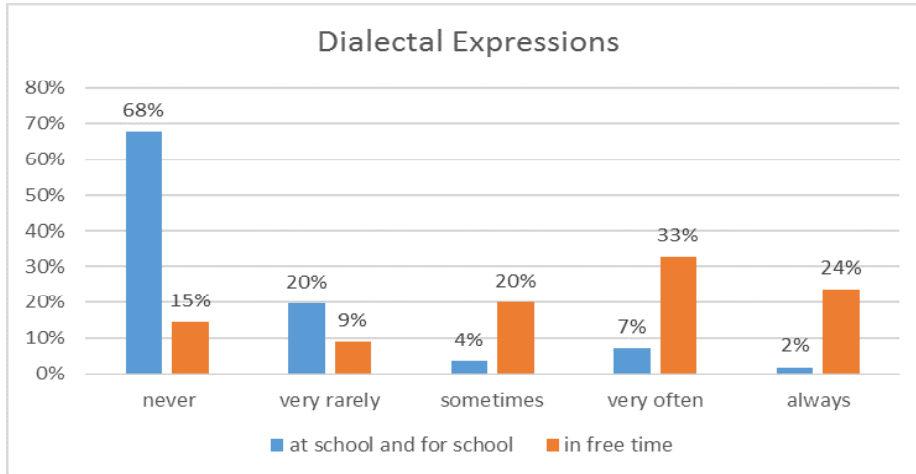


Figure 8. Use of dialectal expressions in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the texts written in new media in free time

3.9. *Vulgarisms and blasphemes*

77% of the students in this research study never use vulgarisms in the texts written at school, whereas only 22% never use them in their leisure time texts. In the texts written at school and for school purposes, they are very rarely used by 4% of the students, sometimes by 9% and 7% use them always. In leisure time texts, they are always used by 27% of 8th graders, very often by 18%, sometimes by 25% and very rarely by 7%.

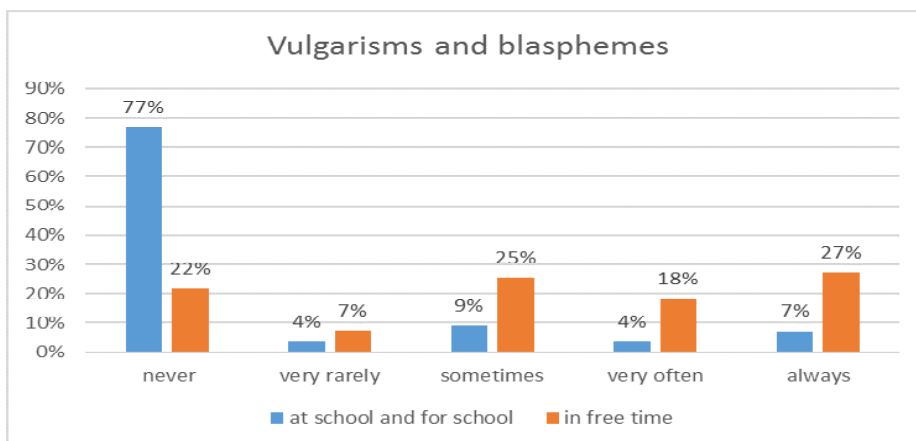


Figure 9. Use of vulgarisms in the texts written at school and for school purposes as well as in the texts written in the new media in free time

We have tried to compare the results of this current research with the results of our own previous research, and with similar research studies that were conducted by other authors.

Research studies of Filipan-Žignić and Turk Sakač 2016 and some other authors (e.g. Schlobinski (2002) and Keus & Corra (2013) in the German speaking area, as well as Crystal (2006, 2011) in the English speaking area) have also pointed to similar observations, i. e. the authors have concluded that in all the languages the literacy of the students has not been threatened due to their writing in the new media because students are very well aware of the difference in writing for school assignments and the writing in the new media.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this research study have confirmed the first hypothesis (H1), as they have shown that the vast majority of 8th grade primary school students never or very rarely use elements of the new media language in school-written texts: all capital letters, lowercase letters, mixed letters, exclamation marks and smiles, syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without auxiliary verbs, *aorist* and *imperfekt* tenses instead of the *perfekt* tense, dialectisms and vulgarisms.

However, the second hypothesis (H2) has been confirmed only for some elements of the language of new media: dialectisms, exclamation marks and smiles, use of only lowercase letters. They are the only elements that 8th grade primary school students mainly use very often or always as the elements of the language of new media when they write in the new media in their free time on *Facebook*, in chatrooms, forums and SMS messages (*Viber*, *WhatsApp* ...). Other elements of the language of new media (all capital letters, mixed letters, syntagmas without a subject, syntagmas without auxiliary verbs, use of the *aorist* and *imperfekt* tenses instead of the *perfekt* tense, vulgarisms) are mostly used only sometimes, very rarely or never by 8th grade primary school students. This suggests that the latter elements of the language of the new media are not popular with 8th graders and that they are not part of their written expression in the new media for most students.

Therefore, there are not enough elements to confirm the opinion that the language of primary school students in their written school assignments has deteriorated because of the use of the language of new media on the Internet and mobile phones, which means that the language of the new media does not currently have a negative effect on the literacy

of primary school students (H3), although the writing in the new media differs from traditional written texts primarily due to linguistic economics and technological constraints. It is a fact that young people largely use some elements of language of new media (dialectal expressions, exclamation marks and signs of laughter as well as lowercase letters) almost in all the texts written in their free time in the new media (on the internet and on the mobile phone), but at this point it seems that there have been no negative influences on the literacy of school children due to their frequent use the language of new media. Indications of the possible negative impact of writing in the new media on school writings among 8th graders may appear only in several student estimates of very frequent and regular use of lowercase letters as the element of the language of new media, although it is possible that there was some lack of understanding of that question or that they were examples of hasty and unpremeditated answers.

In 2016, the authors made a similar conclusion in the analysis of the results for other elements of the language of new media that are not mentioned in this study (anglicisms, abbreviations, emoticons, multiple punctuation marks and other iconic characters). The vast majority of 8th grade primary school students never or very rarely use the mentioned elements of the language of new media in school assignments, whereas at the same time mostly they often or always use them only when they write in the new media in their free time.

However, it does not hurt to express some reservations about the way students express their opinion about their use of the elements of language the new media by means of a questionnaire in which a small number of them have stated that they use certain elements in their own school-text writings. Research studies with grammar school students by Filipan-Žigniæ et. al. in 2015 and 2016, which used the Oxford WordSmith 6.0 computer program as the tool, deviated to a lesser extent from their statements in the questionnaire precisely in that segment, and would be therefore be advisable to test 8th grade primary school texts by means of the same tool in order to get 100% reliable results.

It would also be desirable to do a follow-up study of the literacy of 8th grade primary school students in the foreseeable future to determine whether or not the long-term use of the elements of the language of new media in different Internet services or SMS could lead to some changes that might indicate the deterioration of young people's literacy in the future.

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