

Early Bilingualism in a Multicultural Community

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Abstract

Due to the multicultural environment in Istria which also gave grounds to the need to protect and foster the rights of the Italian minority in this region, there are numerous educational institutions that offer a programme in Italian language for preschool and elementary school children. Our research has shown that those programmes are not attended only by children of the Italian minority but also by children of Croatian origin, who are not native speakers of Italian. The purpose of our research was to establish the reasons why parents choose an education in Italian for their children, and to find out if there is a correlation between the choice to continue the education in Italian language and the native language that the children speak.

Our research has included preschool teachers and teachers in primary education that work in kindergarten and elementary schools in Italian language in Istria. The research has shown that according to the perceptions of preschool and primary school teachers, as well as taking into consideration the opinions of parents, it is possible to conclude that parents often enrol their children in preschools and elementary schools mostly because they want them to continue their education in the Italian language, because they want their children to learn how to better use the second language (SL), or to help them create their ethnical identity and to promote the conservation of Italian culture, traditions, customs and values. Data collected in this research will be used to analyze the influences of multicultural surroundings with regards to learning Italian as a SL by children, native speakers of Croatian, as well as to promote the development of intercultural interaction and respect for diversity between children.

Key words: *communicability; Croatian-speaking children; interaction; Italian language; multiculturalism.*

Introduction

According to Mesić and Bagić (2011), culturally different (multicultural) societies are those which regard ethnic, racial, religious and/or language minorities, while on the other hand, this differentiation is historically conditioned and inherited. In multicultural societies similar to ours, the reference point is that there are historical and deeply rooted national minorities and ethnic groups which are well integrated into the society. Thus, the notion and ideal of interculturalism as the intercultural dialogue between different cultures that live together in the same area are directed toward education through multiculturalism (Drandić, 2012). Aiming at the protection of national minorities and respect of their rights, the European Council (2008) issued the document *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue - Living Together as Equals in Dignity* and obliged all its members, including Croatia, to develop and respect diversities through intercultural dialogue. While accepting differences, according to Mesić (2006, p. 37) requires legal changes, the respect of the same necessitates changes in attitudes and people's thoughts. For Parekh (2000) this is an open dialogue among different cultures freed of any prejudices, open for attitude changes and the acceptance of all forms of diversity.

As a historical region, Istria is a multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic community. According to the 2011 census, Istria has more than 208,000 inhabitants, 15.57% of them being various national minorities. The Italian community with 12,543 inhabitants is the most numerous and it constitutes 6% of the total number of inhabitants of the whole area. Thus, article 24 of the County of Istria Statute (2009), as its most important document, states that:

Members of the Italian national community are guaranteed the right to publicly use their language and script, the right to preserve their national and cultural identity and with that scope found cultural and other associations which are autonomous, the right to freely organise informative and publishing activities, the right to education and primary, secondary and university education in their own language following special programmes adequately consisting of their history, culture, science, as well as the right to show their national symbols.

More than ever before, the kindergarten and school are, as Piršl (2011) has claimed, places where different cultures meet. The contact with diversities and their interaction are, according to Buterin and Jagić (2014), the starting point for the creation and advancement of intercultural communication competences with the aim of sensitizing children for cultural differences and for common education and life existing in their environment. Children learn their mother tongue naturally, according to Vilke (1999), they communicate spontaneously in everyday situations so they can learn another (foreign) language in a similar way. Riley (2007) has emphasized that if children start learning foreign languages at an early age, they go through situations similar to those when learning the mother tongue. Younger children are more motivated

to learn a second (foreign) language, they want to learn it because it is interesting, and they enjoy the activities and the positive atmosphere. However, as Velički (2007) observed, not all children learn languages in the same way, so the acquisition of listening and articulation habits as the preconditions of oral communication and the beginning of foreign language learning should be encouraged. In early second language learning, it is important to motivate children to learn using word games, tongue twisters and rhymes followed by movements. In such a way children notice and understand the phonetic base of a certain language, they remember shorter semantic structures which they use in active speech later on. In the preschool and early primary school period such exercises are introduced in the form of a game accompanied by children's natural capability and need for imitation (Velički, 2007). The encouragement of multilingualism does not imply the suppression or neglect of the mother tongue. Language mixing (code mixing), as considered by Ansaldo (2010), is a natural occurrence, because during the contact both languages keep their identity, they do not make a new language, but they take over some elements from the other language and the interaction between different cultures which understand each other is created. According to Hržica, Padovan and Kovačević (2011), multilingualism is considered a language occurrence which brings a lot of advantages to the speakers: communicative (through the common interaction of different languages), cultural (participation and learning through different cultures) and cognitive (the capability of creative thinking). Together they are more important than the sole fact of knowing two languages. Ioan Bowen Rees (according to Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 1) stated: "we raise children to be bilingual, not for the language, but for the children's sake."

Advantages of Early Language Acquisition and Learning

Differently from persons who choose to learn a new language of their own free will, a bilingual person is simultaneously or consecutively exposed to complex language systems linked to the social, linguistic, cognitive or emotional sphere (Contento, Melani, & Rossi, 2010). The definitions of bilingualism are different in regard to the linguistic competence, cognitive structure, age of language acquisition, the social environment, socio-cultural status and cultural identity. They span from the concept's definition in a wider, but still realistic, sense toward a narrower, more rigorous with less contacts with reality (Benčić & Scotti Jurić, 2013). According to Giraltoni (2009), bilingualism begins when a speaker of a language is capable of using a few meaningful sentences in another language. While for Banjavčić and Erdeljac (2009) bilingualism can be determined when the speaker starts understanding expressions in another language although not able to produce some, MacNamara (1967) and Baker (2011) consider a bilingual person to be each one having a minimal competence in one of the four language skills: comprehension, speech, reading and writing in a language which is not one's mother tongue. However, the simplest and general way to describe bilingual individuals is to describe them as speakers who own any functional skill

in the use of a second language along with the first one, the mother tongue, since most experts who deal with this phenomenon agree with the statement that there are different levels of bilingualism varying from person to person.

The bilingual environment we live in enables persons from other cultures and languages to get into contact with the Italian language. Sometimes children acquire the language from the environment, but more often, they learn it in kindergarten/school, as the results of this research have shown.

A bilingual child acquires two languages at the same time, and according to the nature of language acquisition, there is simultaneous bilingualism or exposure to two languages from the moment of birth and successive bilingualism or adding a second language from the third year of age on. The way the child will acquire the two languages depends on the period when the second language is introduced; an early exposure to a language and its use contribute to the development of a broader vocabulary (Scheele, 2010) and a greater cognitive flexibility of the child (Colja, 2013). According to Baker and Jones (1998), when it comes to the advantages of bilingualism, there are usually five areas where they are reflected: communication, development of linguistic sensibility, cultural richness, profession and cognitive abilities. Some are of the opinion that a bilingual speaker who uses two languages inside the family can communicate with each parent in their mother tongue. Moreover, the bilingual speaker communicates with a larger number of people as opposed to the monolingual speaker and creates mutual interactions in an easier way. Bilingual persons also have a more developed communicational sensibility than monolingual speakers. They usually think about the language they will use in a certain social context and environment and it is easier for them to adapt to the interlocutors' communicative needs. They also have a higher level of empathy towards others (Baker & Jones, 1998). That is why a variety of languages and cultures represents richness and inexhaustible sources of creativity which should be preserved with the aim of forming a world which respects individual differences.

Research Methodology

Research Aims and Hypotheses

The aim of the conducted research was to determine the following, according to preschool and primary education teachers' evaluations: the reasons why parents decide to educate their children in the Italian language; whether only children whose mother tongue is Italian enrol in the Italian kindergarten; whether only children who attended the Italian kindergarten continue with primary school in Italian, and whether there is a difference in preschool and school teachers' answers about the continuation of children's education in the Italian language regarding their age and years of service. In line with the basic aim of the research the paper shows results including the attitudes of preschool teachers who work in Italian kindergartens as well as those of primary education teachers from primary schools in the Italian language in the County of Istria.

Hypotheses

- H1 – only children whose mother tongue is Italian attend kindergarten in the Italian language.
- H2 – only children who attended kindergarten in the Italian language attend primary school in the Italian language.
- H3 – According to preschool and primary education teachers, parents usually enrol their children in an Italian language kindergarten and primary school to continue the education in the Italian language.
- H4 – There is no significant difference in the preschool and school teachers' age and years of service and their opinion about the continuation of children's education in the Italian language.

Research Instrument

Two measuring instruments were created for the needs of this research, one for the preschool teachers' self-evaluation of attitudes and the other for the primary education teachers' self-evaluation of attitudes.

The questionnaire for the preschool teachers' self-evaluation (RANDVVR) consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire regarded general information about the preschool teachers (gender, age, years of service and education completed). The second part consisted of one question (the continuation of education in the Italian language of children who had attended the Italian kindergarten), as well as nine subscales:

- a) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of children's initial communication – 4 items (e.g. the child communicates with the preschool teacher in the standard Italian language)
- b) Subscale for the evaluation of the communication language/dialect among children in the kindergarten group – 4 items (e.g. children communicate among themselves in the Čakavian dialect)
- c) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of communication between children and preschool teachers during activities – 4 items (e.g. during activities the communication is conducted in the Croatian language)
- d) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of communication between children and preschool teachers in individual contacts – 4 items (e.g. communication between teachers and children during individual contacts is conducted in the Italian language)
- e) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of preschool teachers in their individual communication with the Croatophone child – 4 items (e.g. the Croatophone child communicates with the teacher in the Croatian language)
- f) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of communication between children and parents at home – 4 items (e.g. communication at home is conducted in the Čakavian dialect)
- g) Subscale for the evaluation of the time needed for the Croatophone child to begin communicating in the Italian language – 5 items (e.g. the Croatophone

child begins communicating in the Italian language after a year spent in the Italian kindergarten)

- h) Subscale for the evaluation of the choice of didactic activities used by preschool teachers to help children master the communication in the Italian language – 8 items (e.g. teachers use the didactic activity singing and reciting rhymes)
- i) Subscale for the evaluation of reasons why children enrol in an Italian kindergarten – 7 items (e.g. to learn their grandparents and other relatives' language)

The questionnaire for primary school teachers' evaluation (RANDVOS) consisted of general information about the teachers (gender, age, years of service, grade of pupils they work with). The second part of the questionnaire had two sections (about the previous attendance of kindergarten in the Italian, Croatian and other languages and about the evaluation of the number of children continuing the educational in the Italian language) and five subscales:

- a) Subscale for the evaluation of reasons for the enrolment in a primary school in the Italian language – 7 items (e.g. to learn another language apart from their own)
- b) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of pupils' communication in the classrooms during lessons – 4 items (e.g. pupils communicate in the Italian language)
- c) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of communication among pupils in the classroom – 4 items (e.g. pupils communicate among themselves in the Italian language)
- d) Subscale for the evaluation of the language/dialect of communication between teachers and parents – 4 items (e.g. teachers communicate with parents in the Italian language)
- e) Subscale for the evaluation of language/dialect of communication between pupils and parents – 4 items (e.g. pupils communicate with parents in the Istro-Venetian dialect)

In both questionnaires, these are items intended for the measurement of preschool and primary education teachers' attitudes evaluation of children's communication in the Italian and Croatian standard language, the Istro-Venetian and Čakavian dialect, as well as toward various reasons important for deciding on the education in the Italian language and the connection of the mother tongue and education in the Italian language.

A five-point Likert-type scale was used, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 strong agreements with the offered statement. The collected data was processed by the program package SPSS v.20.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), so that the arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for the purpose of descriptions, while for certain subscales and for both questionnaires the Cronbach

alpha coefficient of consistency was calculated. The internal consistency coefficients obtained for subscales in the first questionnaire (RANDVVR) have the reliability from bordering ($\alpha=0.63$) to very good values ($\alpha=0.78$). Moreover, the consistency coefficients for subscales in the second questionnaires (RANDVOS) are reliable ranging from bordering ($\alpha=0.60$) to acceptable ($\alpha=0.70$). According to the usual criteria for the Cronbach alpha consistency coefficient (DeVallis, 2012), it can be concluded that for the first questionnaire (RANDVVR) regarding preschool teachers, the adequacy to do research on this population is very good, while for the other questionnaire (RANDVOS) regarding teachers, the instrument is of bordering adequacy. However, to be able to use these instruments for further research, it is necessary to improve the formulation of statements, increase the number of items and include parents. It is also necessary to measure other characteristics like validity, objectivity and sensitivity and so create an instrument which could be used to measure early bilingualism of children and pupils in multicultural environments.

Sample of Participants and Research Procedure

The research was conducted in 2014, on a sample of 98 participants, 69 preschool teachers and 29 primary education teachers working in kindergartens and primary schools in the Italian language in the County of Istria. Most preschool teachers were women (98.6%), aged between 31 and 40, and having between 2 and 10 years of service (44.9%). All participating preschool teachers completed the undergraduate specialist study of preschool education. Furthermore, when considering primary school teachers, the majority were also women (86.2%), between the age of 31 and 40, and having between 11 and 20 years of service in the education. The primary education teachers included in the research completed the undergraduate or graduate teacher study. The notion *preschool teacher* and *primary education teacher* will be used further on in the paper to denominate both genders.

Results and Discussion

In this research, preschool teachers were asked to provide a response to the statement about the language/dialect which was, according to their evaluation, the one used in the initial communication between preschool teachers and children in the first days after enrolling in kindergarten. They were offered two languages as answers, namely the Italian and Croatian standard language, and two dialects mostly used in the County of Istria, the Čakavian and Istro-Venetian dialect. Table 1 shows the results of their evaluations. According to preschool teachers' evaluations, children enrolled in an Italian kindergarten mostly used the Čakavian dialect in their initial communication with the preschool teacher ($M=3.36$; $SD=1.31$), more rarely the Italian ($M=3.36$; $SD=1.02$) or Croatian standard language ($M=3.24$; $SD=.89$), while the Istro-Venetian dialect was used very rarely ($M=2.42$; $SD=1.09$). According to the obtained results, it can be concluded that the initial communication between children and preschool

teachers was conducted in the Čakavian dialect. This information shows that for most of the children enrolled in an Italian kindergarten the Italian language is not the mother tongue and that the Čakavian dialect is closer to them due to the fact that their mother tongue is the Croatian language. It is thus a fact that most children attending the Italian kindergarten are not necessarily members of the Italian national minority of Istria, but they are children whose parents consider it beneficial for them to attend a kindergarten in a language which is not their mother tongue. Moreover, children who are members of the Italian community conducted their communication with preschool teachers in the Istro-Venetian dialect. Consequently, considering their parents' regional appurtenance and origins as well as the demographic changes and migrations before and after the second World War, the Istro-Venetian dialect remained to be used by adults in this area and accordingly by small children.

Table 1
Initial communication in the children's language/dialect after enrolling in kindergarten (N=69)

	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Initially-Italian language	1.00	5.00	3.36	1.02
Initially-Istro-Venetian d.	1.00	4.00	2.42	1.09
Initially-Croatian language	2.00	5.00	3.24	.89
Initially-Čakavian dialect	1.00	5.00	3.75	1.31

Table 2 shows the results of preschool teachers' evaluations regarding the reasons for children's enrolment in Italian kindergartens. The highest ranked statement is the one regarding the continuation of the education in the Italian language (M=4.23; SD=6.21), then learning another language apart from their own (M=4.05; SD=.70), while the statement regarding the formation of a future ethnic identity (M=2.81; SD=1.17) and the parents' decision to enrol their children in an Italian kindergarten to contribute to maintaining the Italian culture, tradition, customs and values in the multicultural community (M=2.75; SD=.60) were poorly evaluated.

Table 2
Reasons of children's enrolment in an Italian kindergarten according to preschool teachers (N=69)

Reasons of enrolment in an Italian kindergarten	Min.	Max.	M	SD
To learn another language apart from own	2.00	5.00	4.05	.70
To learn their grandparents' and relatives' language	2.00	4.00	2.68	.69
To continue the education in the Italian language	2.00	5.00	4.23	.62
Due to the quality of services offered by Italian institutions	2.00	4.00	2.55	.60
With the aim of creating a future ethnic identity	1.00	5.00	2.81	1.17
To contribute to the maintenance of the Italian culture, tradition, customs and values	1.00	4.00	2.75	.60
To become sensitive towards other cultures and languages	1.00	5.00	2.62	.95

After showing the results obtained from the preschool teachers' evaluations, what follows are the results obtained from primary education teachers' answers in primary schools of the Istrian County educating children in the Italian language. Except for pupils whose mother tongue is Italian, these schools can be attended by pupils not having Italian as their mother tongue, but capable of following lessons and communicating in the Italian language.

Based on the research findings (Table 3), and according to the data parents gave to teachers at the time of their enrolment in school, children who enrolled primary school in the Italian language had attended the Italian kindergarten (89.7%), while only a small number of them had attended kindergarten in the Croatian language (3.45), in the English language (3.4%) or in the Russian language (3.4%).

Table 3
The kindergarten attended by children before enrolling in a primary school in the Italian language (N=29)

	f	%
In the Italian lang.	26	89.7
In the Croatian lang.	1	3.4
In the English lang.	1	3.4
In the Russian lang.	1	3.4

Moreover, the research investigated the reasons, according to the evaluations of primary education teachers, which encouraged parents to enrol their children in an Italian primary school, regardless of the fact that these parents or children are members of the Italian or some other national minority or of the Croatian people living in the area of the County of Istria. The obtained results coincide with preschool teachers' attitudes and evaluations shown in the first part of the paper. Namely, teachers highly evaluate the parental decision to enrol their children in an Italian school to continue the education in the Italian language ($M=4.41$; $SD=.50$).

Table 4
Reasons for children's enrolment in a primary school in the Italian language according to teachers' evaluations (N=69)

	Min.	Max.	M	SD
To learn another language apart from own	3.00	5.00	3.27	.52
To learn their grandparents' and relatives' language	2.00	5.00	2.96	.98
To continue the education in the Italian language	4.00	5.00	4.41	.50
Due to the quality of services offered by Italian institutions	3.00	4.00	3.17	.38
With the aim of creating a future ethnic identity	2.00	5.00	3.27	.99
To contribute to the maintenance of the Italian culture, tradition, customs and values	1.00	5.00	3.79	1.14
To become sensitive towards other cultures and languages	1.00	5.00	3.06	1.03

Results presented in Table 4 show ($M=3.79$; $SD= 1.14$) that primary education teachers gave a high evaluation for the importance of maintaining the Italian culture, its tradition, customs and values,

where everybody could equally contribute, regardless of them being members of the Italian minority or just wanting to learn another language apart from their mother tongue ($M=3.27$; $SD=.52$). It has been noticed that the creation of a future ethnic identity through learning and communication in the Italian language is regarded as an equally important factor for enrolling in an Italian school. Besides, the quality of services offered in Italian institutions, as teachers think, can also influence the parents' decision for their children to continue their education in the Italian language ($M=3.17$; $SD=0.38$).

Through examining and comparing the preschool teachers' attitudes about their own evaluations of the continuation of education in the Italian language according to their age (Table 5), it can be seen that examinees aged between 31 and 40 and those aged between 41 and 50 think that children enrol in an Italian kindergarten to continue the education in the Italian language. The difference between those two groups of preschool teachers of different age is not statistically significant ($t=1.06$; $df=18$; $p=.30$).

Table 5

The comparison of the continuation of education in the Italian language depending on the preschool teachers' age

	age	N	M	SD	t	df	p
continuation of of the education in the Italian language	31-40	11	4.45	.52	.06	18	.30*
	41-50	9	4.22	.44			

* $p > 0.05$

Data from Table 6 show that there is no statistically significant difference among the examinees having 2 to 10 years of service, as well as preschool teachers having from 11 to 20 years of service. That means that preschool teachers, regarding their years of service, equally think that children continue with their education in the Italian language regardless of them being members of the Italian national minority or some other nation or minority ($t=1.43$; $df=14$; $p=.17$).

Table 6

The comparison of the continuation of education in the Italian language depending on the teachers' years of service

	Y/o/S	N	M	SD	t	df	p
continuation of the education in the Italian language	2-10	6	4.66	.52	1.43	14	.17*
	11-20	10	4.30	.48			

* $p > 0.05$

The scale determining how primary education teachers evaluate the reasons parents' enrol their children in a primary school in the Italian language did not show a statistically significant difference between the teachers regarding their age ($t=-1.06$; $df=45$; $p=.29$). Both groups of examinees aged 31 to 40 and 41 to 50 equally evaluated the parents' decisions to enrol their children in a primary school in the Italian language after they had attended the Italian kindergarten (Table 7).

Table 7

The comparison of the continuation of education in the Italian language depending on the primary education teachers' age

	age	N	M	SD	t	df	p
continuation of the education in the Italian language	31-40	32	3.37	.79	-1.06	45	.29*
	41-50	15	3.67	1.05			

* $p > 0.05$

It has been determined that there is no statistically significant difference regarding the teachers' answers and their years of service when referring to the statement that parents enrol their children in a primary school in the Italian language to continue the education in the Italian language ($t=-21$; $df=51$; $p= .82$). Namely, teachers with 2 to 10 and those with 11 to 20 years of service equally think that parents enrol their children in an Italian language school to continue their education in the Italian language (Table 8).

Table 8

The comparison of the continuation of education in the Italian language depending on the primary education teachers' years of service

	Y/o/S	N	M	SD	t	df	p
continuation of the education in the Italian language	2-10	31	3.35	.80	-.21	51	.82*
	11-20	22	3.41	1.05			

* $p > 0.05$

Hypothesis 1, which predicted that kindergarten in the Italian language is attended solely by children whose mother tongue is Italian, is rejected since it has been determined that the Italian kindergarten is also attended by Croatophone children or children speakers of the Croatian language, whose mother tongue is not Italian.

Hypothesis 2, which predicted that primary school in the Italian language is attended solely by children who attended the Italian language kindergarten, is accepted. It has been determined that most children who attended the Italian language kindergarten usually continue the education in the Italian language.

Hypothesis 3, which predicted that parents usually enrol their children in a kindergarten or primary school in the Italian language to continue the education in the Italian language, is accepted because it has been determined, according to the reported attitudes of preschool and primary education teachers that parents think that children, members of the Italian community, as well as Croatophone children or speakers of the Croatian language, can in such a way master and use the Italian language well.

Hypothesis 4, which predicted that there is no statistically significant difference in the preschool and primary education teachers' answers, with respect to their age and years of service, about the continuation of children's education in the Italian language, is accepted. It has been determined that both preschool and primary education teachers aged 31 to 40 and 41 to 50, and having 10 to 20 and 21 to 30 years of service

do not show a significant difference in their answers regarding the statement that parents enrol their children in a kindergarten and then a primary school in the Italian language to continue their education in the Italian language. It has also been determined that the most usual reasons for attending kindergarten and primary school in the Italian language, for both members of the Italian minority and children whose mother tongue is Croatian, is the continuation of education in the Italian language, the maintenance of the Italian culture, tradition, customs and values, but also, for children whose mother tongue is the Croatian language and the Čakavian dialect, to successfully master the second language, the language of their living environment, and thus establish communication in a second language with people whose culture is different from their own.

Conclusion

Starting from the fact that Italian kindergartens are also attended by children whose mother tongue is not Italian and the initial communication between the preschool teacher and children is conducted in the Čakavian dialect, these children are able to spontaneously master the Italian language in everyday situations with their peers. Most or all the children having attended kindergarten in the Italian language continue, according to preschool teachers, their education in the Italian language by enrolling an Italian primary school. The research has shown, according to preschool and primary education teachers' perception and considering their contacts with parents, that parents usually enrol children in a kindergarten or school in the Italian language to continue the education in the Italian language, because they want their children to learn how to use the second language better (language of the environment), to form an ethnic identity and to contribute to the maintenance of the Italian culture, tradition, customs and values. Moreover, they think that by knowing the Italian language they could develop better relationships with members of the Italian minority because as they can ensure communication without the language barrier.

The famous philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein declared in 1922 "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (as cited in Dietrich, 1973, p. 177). In 2000, the *united in diversity* became the motto of the European Union promoting the acquisition of foreign languages, taking an effort for each of its inhabitants to master at least two foreign languages alongside their mother tongue, which would additionally avoid discrimination on a linguistic base.

In multicultural environments, the knowledge of another culture's language enables a common interaction and an easier understanding, respecting and learning about different cultures. The results obtained in this research will be used in the analysis of the multilingual environment's influence on learning the Italian language as the second language (L2) for children speakers of the Croatian language and for the development of intercultural interaction and respect of diversities among children. The continuation of research about the phenomenon of early bilingualism in a

multicultural environment is suggested, as well as the inclusion of other languages and cultures in order to obtain a clear picture about the acquisition of the second (foreign) language with children of an early preschool and school age.

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Rana dvojezičnost u višekulturnoj zajednici

Sažetak

S obzirom na multikulturno okruženje i u cilju njegovanja prava talijanske nacionalne manjine, u Istarskoj županiji djeluje velik broj odgojno-obrazovnih ustanova na talijanskom jeziku. Međutim, istraživanje je pokazalo da se u vrtiće i škole na talijanskom jeziku upisuju ne samo djeca pripadnici talijanske nacionalne manjine već i djeca kojima talijanski jezik nije materinski. U skladu s temeljnim ciljem našeg istraživanja namjera nam je bila utvrditi koji su razlozi zbog kojih se roditelji odlučuju na školovanje djece na talijanskom jeziku, zatim postoji li povezanost nastavka školovanja na talijanskom jeziku i materinskog jezika djece koja su pohađala talijanski vrtić. Istraživanje je provedeno među odgajateljima i učiteljima primarnog obrazovanja koji rade u vrtićima i školama na talijanskom jeziku u Istarskoj županiji. Istraživanje je pokazalo da prema percepcijama odgajatelja i učitelja, a s obzirom na kontakte s roditeljima, možemo zaključiti da roditelji najčešće upisuju djecu u vrtić i školu na talijanskom jeziku zbog nastavka vertikalne obrazovanja na talijanskom jeziku, jer žele da djeca bolje nauče drugi jezik (jezik sredine), radi stvaranja etničkog identiteta te da bi pridonijeli održavanju talijanske kulture, tradicije, običaja i vrijednosti. Podaci dobiveni istraživanjem poslužit će za analizu utjecaja višejezične okoline na učenje talijanskog jezika kao drugog jezika (L2) djece govornika hrvatskog jezika, te za razvijanje međukulturne interakcije i poštivanja različitosti među djecom.

Ključne riječi: djeca govornici hrvatskog jezika; interakcija; multikulturalnost; otvorenost; talijanski jezik.