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THE IMPACT OF LOCAL SPEECH OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE ISLAND OF VIS ON THE ACQUISITION OF ITALIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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The paper contributes to the study and the preservation of local idioms of Komiža and Vis as well as to the study of the influence of Romance languages on their lexicon. In order to protect the local language heritage, empirical research was conducted among primary school students who, by means of questionnaires, indicated the extent to which they are aware of the cultural affiliation and knowledge of their native local idiom in the context of the pedagogical process. Students were asked to express their attitude toward their local speech and the potential awareness of interlingual similarities between their local idiom and Italian language on the lexical level. A translation of a short text from Italian into the local idiom was also used in order to identify Romance loanwords that build up the repertoire of everyday words used by the young population. The research also included semi-structured interviews with local teachers of Croatian and Italian who declared the presence of local idiom in the teaching process. Whether teachers in local schools on the island of Vis have the tendency to use contrastive analysis as a teaching method and whether they integrate dialectal contents into additional materials and activities was also examined. The results of the research testify to the amount of preservation and usability of the local idioms of Vis within the educational process. Furthermore, they spur the awareness of the need to use the interlingual similarities at lexical level between local idioms of Vis and Italian as the target language for didactic purposes.

Key words: *the island of Vis, local idiom, Romance loanwords, crosslinguistic influence, contrastive analysis, Italian language.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the colossal book *Viški facendijer*, Joško Božanić defines the Chakavian idiom as one of the essential constitutive elements of the Croatian literacy. The author believes that the Chakavian should not be considered an idiom, as many claim, but due to the cultural and linguistic treasures historically contained in the idiom, it has earned the title of a language. The Chakavian *language*, according to Božanić (2015), preserves the elements of the collective memory of the millennium-long experience and cohabitation of peoples in the littoral area. The idiom, therefore, has created not only the linguistic but also the cultural identity of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean area. For the purposes of this paper, we limited the area to the island of Vis and we present the research conducted among the elementary school pupils in Vis and Komiža. When considering the location of the island of Vis as well as its history, it is evident that it had been strongly influenced by the Roman and subsequently the Venetian world, as part of the Mediterranean heritage, since ancient times. The Romance influence is, consequently, reflected in the local idioms of Vis and Komiža due to the centuries of close interaction and Venetian dominance in Dalmatia. This very fact leads to the assumption that the local speeches of the islanders could be perceived as a useful tool in acquiring Italian as a foreign language, given the transparency defined by the presence of Italian loanwords in the local vocabulary repertoire. Since the effect of the lexical similarity between the Italian language and the local idioms of Vis has not yet been researched empirically in the pedagogical context, this paper could contribute to the greater awareness of the linguistic advantages found in elementary school examinees from Komiža and Vis.

The local idioms of Komiža and Vis are indigenous idioms of the island and a very curious phenomenon, i.e., they are a unique subgroup that belongs to the Chakavian dialect. This subgroup consists of so-called Cakavian/Cokavian idioms that differ from the traditional Čakavian idioms in terms of reduced consonantism (Božanić, 2017: 242). The Cakavian/Cokavian idiom of the island of Vis is probably one of the best preserved in Croatia, still used by many, even by the young population of Vis and Komiža. However, it is important to point out that the Čakavian idiom of the island is a somewhat recent phenomenon resulting from the immigration of inhabitants from the mainland during the Turkish conquests. As with most idioms of this type, there is also a Romance influence on Vis idioms, especially in the lexicon. We often associate the Romance influence in these idioms with the Italian and Venetian languages. French, Turkish and German influences have also been registered related to the centuries-old presence of foreigners on this island due to its great military importance (Roki, 1997: 11).

Few studies have dealt with the influence of the dialect of the mother tongue on learning a foreign language and they mostly considered the phonological aspect of that influence (Gardner, 2010; Grosse et al., 1979; Melchers, 1985; Broselow, 1983; Teasdale, 1997; Seubsunk, 1999; James, 1977). Among Croatian authors, Ljubičić (2011) has studied how knowledge of a regional dialect can provide support, on the one hand, and, on the other, negatively interfere with foreign language acquisition. From the point of view of the lexical dimension, the author addresses positive and negative interference caused by the correct or incorrect pairing of Croatian dialectal forms with homophonic or almost homophonic Italian words. Negative interference occurs if a homophone word with a different meaning exists in the standard Italian language, and Croatian dialectal word represents its false pair (Ljubičić, 2011).

To protect the local language heritage, empirical research was conducted using questionnaires whose results reveal the extent to which the locals are aware of the cultural affiliation and knowledge of their native local idiom in the context of the pedagogical process. All the idioms of the pupil's language repertoire can be introduced in the foreign language classroom to facilitate learning process. When encountering a certain foreign language for the first time, pupils are expected to automatically notice similarities with existing forms in their native language (Alujević Jukić, 2012: 44). Therefore, knowing a language or its variety related to a foreign language helps the pupil to identify a word in an unknown language and determine its meaning. Previous empirical research on the crosslinguistic influences on the lexical level (Palmberg, 1985; Carroll, 1992; Nagy, 1992; Granger, 1993; Dijkstra, 2010; Uchida, 2003; Ringbom, 2007; Daulton, 2008) has revealed greater initial comprehension of a new vocabulary of a foreign language based on cognates – semantically related words, sharing phonological and/or orthographic form in two or more languages. Cognates have attracted educators' interest because they provide advantages over non-cognates to language learners (Alujević, 2018).

It has been assumed that Italian language teachers could exploit the pupils' vocabulary as a potential basis for formal language acquisition. Family and peer settings are constituents of a community where a child goes through first language experiences, but educators and foreign language teachers should continue to cultivate and develop the native local speech of pupils so that its particularities would not be *consigned to oblivion* (Božić, 2022).

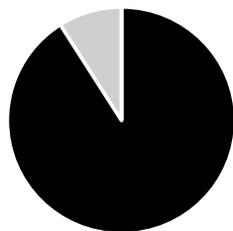
2. RESEARCH

2.1. INSTRUMENT AND SAMPLE

Empirical research was conducted among elementary school pupils in both Vis and Komiža to test the assumption that the local idiom of the islanders could be perceived as an efficient tool in acquiring Italian as a foreign language. A short questionnaire was created for in which the participants were asked to answer questions concerning their attitude towards the local idiom, Italian as a foreign language, and their awareness of the relation between these two. To test their ability to observe these relations in practice, the pupils were asked to translate a short text from the Italian language into their local idiom. For the etymology of the words, Boerio's dictionary of the Venetian dialect was used. In the research conducted in autumn 2022, 18 pupils from Komiža and 23 from Vis participated, all aged 12 to 15 and attending Italian language classes. A short interview was conducted with the teachers to gain an even better insight into the use of local idioms in teaching. The results are presented below.

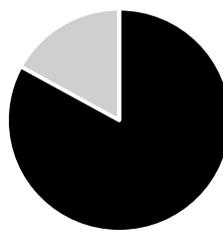
2.2. RESULTS

Elementary school pupils in local schools of Vis and Komiža have shown a relatively positive attitude towards the Italian language. Most of pupils expressed a preference for Italian, stating that they liked it or liked it to a certain extent, while the exposure to this language is on average occasional or rare. Pupils have also shown positive attitudes towards their local idiom. In fact, 83 % of elementary school pupils in Komiža and 91 % of those in Vis answered positively to the question of whether they like their local idiom, as shown in the pie charts below.



■ YES ■ NO

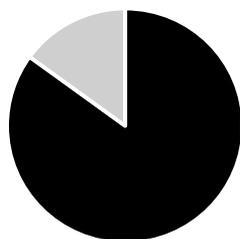
Chart 1. The inclination of elementary pupils in Vis towards their local idiom



■ YES ■ NO

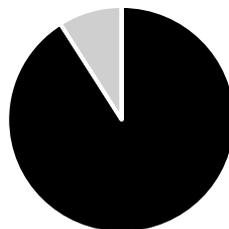
Chart 2. The inclination of elementary pupils in Komiža towards their local idiom

These results are somewhat contrary to opinions about the loss of reputation of the Italian language in Dalmatia and about the increasing resistance of young people to their local idiom. However, it should be kept in mind that these are pupils who voluntarily decided to study Italian as a foreign language, and it is presumed that they have positive attitudes toward it. To discover how aware the pupils are of the relation between these two idioms, they were asked whether they noticed similarities between the local idiom and the Italian language. The results have shown that the pupils are fully aware of similarities and of the Romance influence. In fact, only two respondents answered this question negatively. The fact that even 85 % of all pupils answered positively to the question about the usefulness of the local idiom in studying the Italian language is very optimistic. The results of this category are shown in the pie chart below.



■ agree ■ don't agree

Chart 3. Recognition of the usefulness of the local idiom in studying the Italian language



■ YES ■ NO

Chart 4. Exposure to the contrastive analysis between Italian L2 and local idiom

Moreover, pupils in both elementary schools were already familiar with the use of examples from local idiom to facilitate the acquisition of the Italian lexicon. The fact that even 94 % of pupils from Komiža and 91 % of pupils from Vis claim to have already used contrastive analysis is quite encouraging. The percentages of their exposure to this method are shown below.

In a short interview, the teachers emphasized the importance of this strategy, especially when introducing a new lexicon and for global reception. Another interesting strategy was of a teacher from Komiža who, in addition to comparing local idiom and Italian words, also uses a comparison with the English language words of

Latin roots. The teachers also fully agreed with the assumption that the knowledge of the local idiom could help in learning the Italian language, but both pointed out the problem that arises if the loanword is adopted in a distorted way. As an example, they cited the noun *mutandine*, which in local idiom has a slightly different form – *mudantine*. All in all, the teachers agreed that the local idiom improves global reception. It is also interesting that teachers often notice cases in which pupils apply an analogy with their own local idiom during independent vocabulary learning. This phenomenon occurs especially among pupils more exposed to the local idiom, as confirmed by the questionnaire. Therefore, pupils more competent in their local idiom are more aware of its connection with the Italian language and can effectively use that connection in practice. When asked whether pupils like the Italian language because of its similarity to the local idiom, the teachers pointed to a »trend« that negatively affects the local idiom and the Italian language. Indeed, they confirmed the assumption that the local idiom is less and less nurtured but also pointed out that the Italian language is no longer an attractive language for elementary school-aged children. So, the similarities between the Italian language and the local idiom exist and pupils are aware of them, but the fact that the knowledge of the local idiom is decreasing and that Italian is no longer so attractive, still affects its reputation today.

After the general part of the questionnaire concerning the pupils' attitudes, a short text in Italian standard language followed that the pupils had to translate into their local idiom. The aim was to show the extent of the presence of Romance loanwords in the idioms of elementary school children. The text contained 12 hidden Romance loanwords present in the local idioms of Vis that the pupils had to spot. Those were words used often in everyday speech (*la fetta, l'asciugamano, la borsa, la barca, la nonna, il soldo, la cartolina, la festa, la soffitta, il ravanello, la melanzana, il pomodoro*). Of all the words, the most often replaced by the corresponding Romance loanwords during the translation are undoubtedly *fetta, asciugamano, borsa, nonna, melanzana* and *pomodoro*. It is interesting that when translating the word *pomodoro* we find different variations such as *pomedor, poma* or *pomidor*. *Melanzana* was most often replaced by *balancana*, but several examples of *patlidžan* were also found testifying influences from the mainland on the idioms of Vis. The respondents reacted very well to the word *nonna* and thus showed that, under the influence of their elders, they probably cultivated the local idiom more. *Soldo* was sometimes replaced with *šoldi*, although most pupils chose the noun *pinezi* which derives from the German word *Pfennig*. Only ten pupils replaced *cartolina* with the Romance loanword *kartolina*, so we can confirm the rule that the names of subjects no longer in use are slowly disappearing from the vocabulary of young people. When analysing pupils' translations, it was possible to notice large inconsistencies between Vis and Komiža, but also inconsistencies in the translation of a

single respondent. For example, one pupil used the words *pomedor* and *patlidžan*. For most words, pupils from Komiža showed a greater preference for Romance loanwords during translation. This particular result tells us how much the local idiom of Komiža is really preserved from external influences, in contrast to the local idiom of Vis, which is shown in more detail in the column chart.

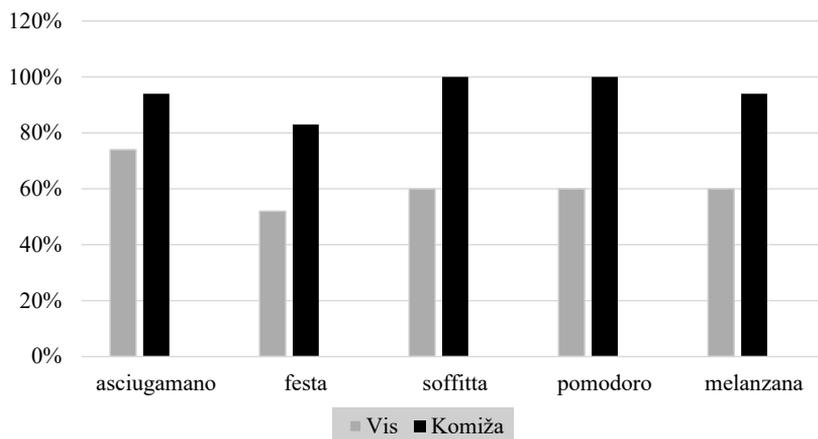


Chart 5. Difference between Vis and Komiža in the preservation of particular local words

3. CONCLUSION

The results testify that contrastive analysis is still an effective strategy for teaching the Italian language on the island of Vis. Although the testimonies of the teachers clearly show that the local idiom is less and less cultivated and that the influences from the mainland are increasing, it is evident that the occasional use of contrastive analysis facilitates the acquisition of a new lexicon and increases pupils' motivation. It is also encouraging that most pupils are aware of the relationship between the Italian language and their local idiom and find it advantageous during language acquisition. All this leads to the conclusion that this strategy not only facilitates the learning of the Italian language but can also be effective in refreshing knowledge of the local idiom and perhaps even encouraging its active use. Research has proved that pupils originating from the island of Vis, who acquire Italian as a foreign language, possess similar vocabulary in their mother tongue variant that enables them to have the basis for understanding the meaning of words and facilitates memorization and vocabulary acquisition. The conclusions obtained by this

research can be practically applied to raising awareness regarding methodological procedures that take advantage of pupils' vocabulary as a potential basis for formal language acquisition. Implementation of results in teaching practice and didactic materials related to the findings can increase pupils' motivation, create a sense of familiarity with the Italian language and culture and contribute towards a more successful acquisition of the Italian vocabulary.

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APPENDIX 1

Molimo vas da u nastavku navedite nekoliko podataka o sebi.

Dob:

Spol:

Mjesto rođenja:

Mjesto prebivališta (mjesto u kojem živite):

Mjesto rođenja oca:

Mjesto rođenja majke:

Koliko dugo učite talijanski jezik?

Gdje učite talijanski jezik?

U nastavku odgovorite na nekoliko pitanja o talijanskom jeziku i lokalnom govoru.

1. Sviđa li ti se talijanski jezik?

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| a) vrlo mi se sviđa | d) nimalo mi se ne sviđa |
| b) sviđa mi se | e) nemam mišljenje o tome |
| c) donekle mi se sviđa | |

2. Mislim da je talijanski jezik:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| a) lako razumjeti | c) nemam mišljenje o tome |
| b) teško razumjeti | |

3. Koliko si često izložen/a talijanskom jeziku?

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| a) često | c) rijetko |
| b) ponekad | d) nikad |

4. Ocijeni koliko dobro poznaješ talijanski jezik:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| a) mnogo | c) malo |
| b) poprilično | d) nimalo |

5. Uočavaš li sličnost između talijanskog jezika i lokalnog govora?

- a) da
b) ne

6. Misliš li da ti poznavanje lokalnog govora može pomoći u učenju talijanskog jezika?

- a) da
b) ne
c) nemam mišljenje o tome

7. Misliš li da ti je poznavanje lokalnog govora dosad pomoglo u učenju talijanskog jezika?

- a) da
b) ne
c) nemam mišljenje o tome

8. Koristi li se tvoja nastavnica talijanskog jezika ponekad primjerima iz lokalnog govora kako bi vam olakšala učenje?

- a) da
b) ne

9. Ocijeni koliko poznaješ lokalni govor.

- a) mnogo
b) poprilično
c) malo
d) nimalo

10. Koliko često koristiš riječi lokalnog govora?

- a) često
b) ponekad
c) rijetko
d) nikad

11. Svida li ti se tvoj lokalni govor?

- a) da
b) ne

12. Voliš li se koristiti lokalnim govorom?

- a) da
b) ne

13. U kojim prilikama i gdje se koristiš lokalnim govorom?

Pozorno pročitajte riječi u nastavku. Molimo vas da za svaku riječ navedete mislite li da možete pretpostaviti njezino značenje. Ako mislite da možete, molimo vas da navedete što mislite da ona znači. U dijelu tablice koji se tiče razumijevanja, upišite X u onaj dio koji se tiče vas (ako mislite da razumijete riječ ili ne).

Redni broj	Talijanska riječ	Mislim da razumijem riječ	Mislim da ne razumijem riječ	Značenje riječi na hrvatskom	Navedite kako ste prepoznali značenje – npr. podsjeća me na određenu riječ iz lokalnog govora
1.	dispetto				
2.	fagiolo				
3.	grosso				
4.	biancheria				
5.	affittare				
6.	pittura				
7.	riga				
8.	carta				

APPENDIX 2

Pitanja za polustrukturirani intervju s nastavnicama talijanskog jezika u lokalnim školama u Visu i Komiži

1) U kojim situacijama i u kojoj mjeri koristite kontrastivnu analizu u nastavi talijanskog jezika?

2) Vjerujete li da poznavanje i izloženost lokalnom govoru može biti faktor koji olakšava učenje talijanskog jezika?

3) Jeste li ikada primijetili slučajeve u kojima učenici tijekom samostalnog učenja riječi primjenjuju analogiju s vlastitim lokalnim govorom?

4) Jeste li ikada primijetili slučajeve u kojima riječi romanskog podrijetla iz lokalnog govora mogu zbuniti učenike (negativni prijenos)?

5) Jeste li primijetili da učenici simpatiziraju talijanski jezik upravo zbog određenih sličnosti s lokalnim govorom?

APPENDIX 3

Molimo vas da kratki tekst u nastavku prevedete s talijanskog jezika na vaš lokalni govor.

Ieri mi sono svegliato/a presto e ho mangiato una fetta di pane con marmellata a colazione. Poi ho preso l'asciugamano e la borsa e sono andato/a in spiaggia. Vicino alla spiaggia c'erano molte barche. Quando sono tornato/a a casa, mia nonna mi ha dato dei soldi con cui ho comprato una cartolina per la mia amica. La sera abbiamo preparato una piccola festa in soffitta. La cena è stata ottima, ma purtroppo non mi piacciono i ravanelli, le melanzane e i pomodori. È stata una bellissima giornata!

UTJECAJ LOKALNOGA GOVORA STANOVNIKA OTOKA VISA NA USVAJANJE TALIJANSKOGA KAO STRANOGA JEZIKA

Sažetak

U radu se prezentiraju stavovi učenika osnovnih škola u Visu i Komiži prema njihovu lokalnome govoru, prema talijanskome kao stranome jeziku, razmatraju se umijeće i sposobnost učenika u uočavanju sličnosti između lokalnoga idioma i talijanskoga jezika te se ispituje kontekst uporabe lokalnoga govora te primjena kontrastivne analize u sklopu metodologije poučavanja talijanskoga kao stranoga jezika. Istraživanje u kojemu su korišteni upitnik za četrdesetak učenika, zadatak prijevoda teksta te intervju s nastavnicama pridonosi osvješćivanju potrebe za korištenjem međujezičnih sličnosti na leksičkoj razini između lokalnih govora otoka Visa i talijanskoga jezika kao ciljnoga jezika u didaktičke svrhe. Implementacija rezultata u nastavu i didaktičke materijale može pridonijeti motivaciji učenika, stvaranju osjećaja bliskosti s talijanskim jezikom i kulturom, olakšanomu razumijevanju te u konačnici razvoju leksičke sastavnice jezične kompetencije na talijanskomu kao stranome jeziku te buđenju interesa i sklonosti prema lokalnome idiomu.

Ključne riječi: otok Vis, lokalni govor, romanizmi, posuđenice, međujezični utjecaj, kontrastivna analiza, talijanski jezik.

L'INFLUENZA DELLA PARLATA LOCALE DEGLI ABITANTI
DELL'ISOLA DI VIS SULL'ACQUISIZIONE DELL'ITALIANO COME
LINGUA STRANIERA

Riassunto

Nel lavoro si presentano le opinioni degli alunni delle scuole primarie di Vis e Komiza riguardo alla loro parlata locale e riguardo all'italiano come lingua straniera, si considerano la competenza e l'abilità degli alunni nel riconoscere le somiglianze tra l'idioma locale e la lingua italiana e si indaga il contesto d'uso della parlata locale e l'applicazione dell'analisi contrastiva nel contesto metodologico dell'insegnamento dell'italiano come lingua straniera. La ricerca nel corso della quale sono stati proposti un questionario per quaranta alunni, un esercizio di traduzione di un testo e un'intervista agli insegnanti contribuisce a rendere consapevoli gli insegnanti della necessità di sfruttare le somiglianze interlinguistiche a livello lessicale tra le parlate locali dell'isola di Vis e la lingua italiana come lingua d'arrivo a scopo didattico. L'implementazione dei risultati nell'insegnamento e nei materiali didattici può contribuire alla motivazione degli alunni, alla creazione di un sentimento di vicinanza con la lingua e la cultura italiane, alla facilitazione della comprensione e in ultima analisi allo sviluppo della componente lessicale della competenza linguistica in italiano come lingua straniera nonché al risveglio dell'interesse e dell'affinità per la parlata locale.

***Parole chiave:** isola di Vis, parlata locale, romanismi, prestiti, influenza interlinguistica, analisi contrastiva, lingua italiana.*

Podatci o autoricama

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