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## PRESERVATION OF DIALECTAL FEATURES IN THE LANGUAGE OF PRIMARY-SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN THE STUBICA-OROSLAVJE-MARIJA BISTRICA AREA OF CROATIAN ZAGORJE

The paper presents the results of a 2024 study conducted as part of the *Kajkaš KAJ?* project. The participants were students of 5 primary schools in the Stubica-Oroslavje-Marija Bistrica area of Croatian Zagorje, and the main goal was to determine the extent to which primary-school-age children use their dialect in everyday speech, as well as how much they are influenced by standard Croatian and/or substandard varieties. The study was conducted by means of a questionnaire designed for the purposes of the study. Among youngest participants, the results of the analysis of selected variables show that their dialect is most preserved at the lexical and least at the morphological level. Such results can be explained by several factors: research methodology, students' perception of lexis as the most salient linguistic level with respect to differences from the standard, etc. In addition to presenting initial and preliminary results of the first stage of the study, the paper also describes certain methodological issues to be addressed in subsequent stages of the project.

## 1. Introduction

In line with the curriculum for the subject Croatian Language in primary schools and grammar schools,<sup>1</sup> dialects are first introduced to students in the second grade of primary school, while from the fourth grade onwards they are expected to master more complex learning outcomes, such as identify all three dialect groups and even contrast their own local idioms with other idioms and standard Croatian. The well-known *linguo-methodical* principle of *nativeness*<sup>2</sup> has recently been recognised in legislation, within the *Language Act* and its aim of supporting the preservation of non-standard,<sup>3</sup> Croatian local idioms in the public arena, as well as primary and secondary school curricula.

The introduction of the concept of vertical bi- and multilingualism in language acquisition research in the last 20 years in Croatia has completely changed the notion of multilingualism as the process of acquiring the standard variety of two different languages. Although studies of vertical bilingualism often rely on speech patterns of kindergarten-age children (Pavličević-Franić 2000:77), the beginning of institutional education in the first grade of primary school also marks the beginning of systematic acquisition of the standard language on all linguistic levels (Mikić Čolić – Gašparević 2021:55). Already in the early stages, the mother tongue – standard language relationship, as previous experiences have shown, is marked by *advergence*, a special aspect of linguistic convergence whereby the standard language takes the position of the superior, more prestigious idiom, and language change is unidirectional (cf. Berruto 2005:82). The next stage is *levelling*, homogenisation within a particular linguistic system and increase of similarities between otherwise different

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mzom.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulum%20nastavnoga%20predmeta%20Hrvatski%20jezik%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije%20u%20RH.pdf>. Cf. also Vignjević 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Since Težak's time, the principle of *nativeness* has gone beyond its primary function of complementing the principle of standard language and supporting the acquisition of its norms, becoming the backbone of fostering native cultural heritage as a whole (Požgaj Hadži – Benjak – Doblanović 2005:409).

<sup>3</sup> The abovementioned Act more specifically addresses the use of only those non-standard idioms that are considered organic and which are in dialectology, with regard to the level of abstraction, classified as local dialects, dialects, etc. In the text of the Act, they are referred to as *dialectal idiom* and *local idiom*. Although it touches on all language registers (»the use of all idioms of Croatian language, and all functional styles of standard Croatian is encouraged«, Paragraph 1, Article 6), other non-standard and substandard idioms (regiolects, sociolects, slangs, etc.) are not mentioned (NN 14/2024).

linguistic systems (Auer–Hinskens–Kerswill 2005:11). Ultimately, early and preschool education accompanied by exposure to media, according to our initial assumptions, heavily influence a child’s linguistic identity since the earliest age. Within this theoretical framework, a study on the actual usage and vitality of dialects has been conducted with primary-school-age children, the results of which will be partially presented in this paper.

In the last ten years, several mutually independent qualitative and quantitative studies on the status of dialect-related content in the primary education system, as well as the need of preserving one’s native idiom have been conducted in Croatia. The participants were students and teachers alike (mostly from elementary classes). Some of these studies focused on attitudes of teachers with regard to the potential and the need of promoting all three dialects in Croatian Language classes (Nemeth-Jajić–Prvulović 2012; Vlah 2020; Mikulić 2023), while others (Turza-Bogdan 2013; Turza-Bogdan–Virč–Čerepinko 2016; Šimičić–Čubelić 2021) dealt with students’ language identity and attitudes towards non-standard varieties. Most of these studies found that participants have a positive attitude towards native varieties, as evidenced by analyses of students’ statements regarding the values represented by non-standard idioms, and their self-assessment of their use. However, the systematic language change affecting local dialects points to a potential discrepancy between expressed attitudes and linguistic practice. Within this context, recent studies have looked at primary school students’ knowledge of their native lexis (Brajčić 2022; Sunara-Jozek–Franjo 2024), demonstrating a relatively high level of comprehension, which confirms our initial hypothesis: Younger speakers perceive lexis as the area that differs most from the standard language, and as such to be the most salient marker of a particular local dialect.

The study presented in this paper was conducted at the beginning of 2024 as part of the *Kajkaš KAJ?* project, which was proposed by the Kajkaviana Association from Donja Stubica, and whose implementation was approved and financially supported by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia. The participants in the project were students of 5 primary schools in the Stubica-Oroslavje-Marija Bistrica area of Croatian Zagorje,<sup>4</sup> with roughly equal representation of students from elementary and subject classes. In PS Donja Stubica and PS Vladimir Bosnar in Stubičke Toplice, the survey was conducted in 3 class departments (in the 4th grade and two departments of the 8th grade in Donja Stubica; in

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<sup>4</sup> We would like to use this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all study participants, in particular teachers who have dedicated a part of their classes and/or extracurricular activities to this project.

the 1st grade and two departments of the 7th grade in Stubičke Toplice), in PS Oroslavje in the 3rd and 4th grades, while in PS Matija Gubec in Gornja Stubica and PS Marija Bistrica, students from all 5 class departments were included (in the 3rd grade, in two departments of the 5th grade, and two departments of the 7th grade in Gornja Stubica; in the 1st grade and two departments of the 6th and 8th grade respectively in Marija Bistrica). A total of 88 elementary and 184 subject class students participated in the study.

The overall aim of the study was to determine the extent to which primary-school-age students use their dialect in everyday speech and how much they are influenced by standard Croatian and/or substandard varieties. In addition, taking into account several factors (current knowledge on early speech development of children in linguistically heterogeneous settings (Kuvač–Cvikić 2005:276; Županović Filipin 2015:279–280), continuous influence of outside dialects on organic idioms, personal experience in observing children's interactions, etc.), several starting hypotheses have been formed. (Un)expected methodological issues notwithstanding, through quantitative analysis we have sought to determine to what extent and on what linguistic level dialectal – Kajkavian features are most preserved. In this paper, we will outline the research methodology and present the results of several select variables<sup>5</sup> on all linguistic levels. We will be able to reach more reliable and far-reaching conclusions only upon more comprehensive analysis of the whole corpus.

### 1.1. Analysed local dialects on a dialectological map

According to the recent classification of the Kajkavian dialect by Mijo Lončarić, all analysed local dialects belong to the dialect of central Zagorje, previously known as the dialect of Bednja-Zagorje. It is a group of local dialects spread over a large area »in the south from Šestine and other former villages currently part of Zagreb (...), east of Dugo Selo to the area north of Ivanec surrounding Gornja Voća and Bednja, east of Budinščina and Konjščina, and west up to Krapina and Krapinske Toplice. Four larger dialect areas are observed: Bednja, Medvednica, Stubice, and Krapina-Ivanec« (Vranić–Zubčić 2018:557).

According to studies by Stjepan Ivšić, these idioms belong to the 1st group where basic Kajkavian accentuation, a three-accent system with an important oxytonesis isophone dividing it into three parts, is most

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<sup>5</sup> A linguistic variable is »a point of language use where several opposing forms exist within a language community, which greatly differ in terms of frequency of use« (Trask 2005:381).

preserved. According to results of recent dialectological studies dealing with local dialects of Croatian Zagorje, with regard to vocals, consonants, and morphology, these idioms are characterised by conservatism, i.e., the presence of linguistic features understood to mostly be typical of Kajkavian:<sup>6</sup> Equal development of schwa and jat that usually result in more closed reflexes than the reflex of etymological *e* and the front nasal (Gornja Bistra: *dělati, dēda, pēs, mēša, pēč, pēpēl*; Rijeka Voćanska: *puvēsmu, mrēžg, snēxg*, NPL *rešētq, pl'ēčq*; Marija Bistrica HJA: *dēšč, GPL desīek, GSG dēžža, čēlē 'čelo'*); assimilation of reflexes *\*o* and *\*l* within the same phoneme (often a diphthong), which is usually more closed than the reflex *\*o* (Gornja Bistra: *roūka, žouč, rōbača, dōga, gōre*; Rijeka Voćanska: *guōskq, stuōp, tōčq, bōxq, gruōzdje, mōtikq*); clusters *\*stj* and *\*skj* in many local dialects resulted in *šč* (Gornja Bistra: *ščāp*, PRES SG 1. *iščēm*; Rijeka Voćanska: *dvuriščē, pūščgti*; Novaki Bistranski HJA: *kl'īēšča*); preserved infinitive – supine distinction (Gornja Bistra: *išla sēm brāt*; Rijeka Voćanska: *jīest, pīt, brāt, spāt*; Lepoglava HJA: SUP *sīēč ~ INF sēči*), etc.

However, given the dearth of research of all 5 local dialects analysed, as well as the fact that local dialects also differ from one another, we do not have sufficient data to synthesise their features. This affects the methodology of studying the degree of linguistic innovativeness, which will be further elaborated in Chapter 2.1.

## 2. Questionnaires and research methodology

The study was conducted by means of a questionnaire that was administered in the schools – project partners – listed in two versions: A more comprehensive version for 3rd to 8h-grade students, and a somewhat simplified version, based on pictorial questions, for students of the first two grades of primary school. The first part of the questionnaire elicited general information on participants' linguistic identity, i.e., students' language use patterns in their everyday surroundings, at school, at home, and during interactions with their peers. The individual assessment of the use of Kajkavian, i.e., dialect, was ranked on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, where attitudes, i.e., the degree of agreement and disagreement with a particular statement was rated as follows: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = mostly, 5 = always. Questions used in the questionnaire are presented in the paper with their original numeration. Below are the 6th and 7th question from both questionnaires, whose aim was to determine the level of awareness with regard to the use of native expressions in different formal and informal situations:

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<sup>6</sup> Data taken from Celinić 2011, 2015 and 2020.

**6. How often is Kajkavian used in your home? Insert + in the appropriate box.**

<i>Statement</i>	1	2	3	4	5
My mom speaks Kajkavian.					
My dad speaks Kajkavian.					
My grandma speaks Kajkavian.					
My grandpa speaks Kajkavian.					
Other family members speak Kajkavian.					

**7. How often do you use Kajkavian? Insert + in the appropriate box.**

	1	2	3	4	5
at school with friends					
at school with teachers					
outside of school with friends (during extracurricular activities, play, socialising...)					
at home with my mom					
at home with my dad					
at home with my grandma					
at home with my grandpa					
at home with other older family members					

Questionnaire for the 1st and 2nd grade examined the use of Kajkavian lexis by means of recognising and naming objects on pictures.

**8. Under the photographs write the word you would use in conversation with friends or a family member!**



The more comprehensive questionnaire for students in grades 3 to 8 yielded many more replies to our numerous initial hypotheses. This questionnaire contained questions pertaining to all linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, word formation) and, as shown in the

examples below, there were two types of questions – multiple choice and open-ended:

**14. In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you refer to your teacher?**

- a) učitelj or učiteljica
- b) učitel or učitelica
- c) vučitelj or vučiteljica
- d) vučitel or vučitelica
- e) other (please write) \_\_\_\_\_

**16. In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say: *U trešnji je crv* (There is a worm in the cherry)?**

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There were 12, 10, 5 and only 1 question pertaining to phonology, morphology, word formation, and syntax respectively, which is in line with usual practices in research of dialectal syntax, where the method of spontaneous speech analysis is most commonly employed. With these questions we wanted to elicit students' replies in regard to features acknowledged in dialectological literature as basic Kajkavian, without delving into local particularities. Among phonological features we have, thus, placed special focus on the reflexes of jat, schwa, back nasal, and syllabic *l*. Although undoubtedly important in descriptions and division of the Kajkavian system, for methodological reasons accent features were not included. With regard to morphology, focus was placed on existence of stability, i.e., disruption of otherwise conservative morphological systems with older endings of nominal declension (such as the (lack of) introduction of new endings in plural forms or coexistence of older and newer variants, e.g., in GPL *krav/krava*, IPL *kravam/kravami/kravama*, etc.), but also other characteristics considered to be typical markers of Kajkavian (use of the supine, only one future form, etc.). Given that the Kajkavian dialect is characterised by more frequent use of the diminutive, apart from examining the formation of comparative forms, the main aim was to ascertain which suffixes are used by the participants to form diminutives and hypocorisms. Syntax was addressed through the use of clitics at the beginning of sentences (question 35: In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say *Jesi me čuo?* (Did you hear me?)).

In the more comprehensive questionnaire, lexis was examined by two types of questions. The first task was identical to the pictorial questionnaire

used with first and second-grade students. The second lexical task was somewhat more complex, and it involved terms that students were supposed to identify, then write the variant they either use in their local dialect or have simply heard in their surroundings, and select yes/no to confirm whether they personally use the non-standard lexeme. The words were sorted in a table, and they were comprised of abstract terms and those phenomena (*bolestan*, *trčati*, *vlažno*, *jučer* (ill, run, moist, yesterday) etc.) difficult to represent in the pictorial questionnaire:

**37. In the middle column, please write the assigned word in your local dialect. Circle YES if you use this Kajkavian word in your dialect, or NO if you do not use it.**

	Your local dialect	Use
jučer (yesterday)		YES NO
podne (noon)		YES NO
odmah (immediately)		YES NO
raditi (to work)		YES NO
Uskrs (Easter)		YES NO

With the assistance of their class and subject teachers, students filled in the questionnaires by themselves, and prior to the beginning of the study, parents have provided their consent on a special form containing the instructions and description of the study. The task was anonymous, and the students needed to provide the following personal data: sex, grade and school they are enrolled in, place of residence, and immediate family members, which was directly connected to questions six and seven (see above).

The more comprehensive version of the questionnaire comprised 37 questions, including the introductory self-assessment part. The final, lexical tasks (questions 36 and 37) included sub-questions: The pictorial part in question 36 contained 12 pictures to be identified and named, and the abovementioned table was comprised of 25 terms. In total, students needed to provide a reply to 72 questions. Fully completed questionnaires, however, provided a lot more information, since a large number of tasks was designed to provide insight into several linguistic features. These are questions eliciting an open-ended textual response, containing two or even more results. A stark example of such a formulation is question 29, which primarily pertains to morphology: *In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say 'Sutra ću dobiti čokoladu'* (Tomorrow

I will get a chocolate)? Here we wanted to see whether students use only one, Kajkavian future tense, but the solutions contained a plethora of information about other levels, in this case phonology (back nasal reflex in the perfective present tense form of the verb *be* and the inflectional morpheme of nouns; the status of final *-l* in the masculine present participle form in the example *dobil/dobio*).

Questions in both questionnaires were formulated to be clearly and unambiguously understood by primary-school-age children, while also trying to reflect students' everyday reality (27. Circle the sentence you would use in conversation with friends or a family member! *a) Moj dres je plav i zelen. / b) Moj dres je plavi i zeleni.* (My jersey is blue and green.) 34. In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say *Moj mačak je veći* (My cat is bigger?)).

## 2.1. Some methodological challenges

During the study, i.e., while checking the filled in questionnaires, several issues came up due to which certain questions were excluded from further analysis. Many student responses were also deemed irrelevant for reaching any certain conclusions.

In some questionnaires we have found a discrepancy between the first and second part, i.e., between participants' positive self-assessment regarding the use of their local idiom in different life situations and replies that on all levels clearly show a high level of influence of outside dialects (such as the reflex *a* in place of schwa (type *danas*), Štakavism (type *dvorište*), etc.). We assume that these participants misunderstood the task and, thus, opted to use the "most correct" forms, which often occurs in regular field research with middle-aged and older participants. Most of these cases pertain to first and second-grade students.

Multiple choice questions contained solutions that mostly reflected the Kajkavian dialect : standard language dichotomy. However, due to great phonological diversity of the idioms analysed, Kajkavian solutions were a kind of Kajkavian *koine*, which may have been confusing for the students. Since the phonological systems of these local dialects contain diphthongs and differently articulated vocals (open and closed), precluding the option of providing all possible responses, we have opted for general solutions, which resulted in the examination of basic Kajkavian features through three possibilities, as in the example pertaining to the reflex of *jat* and the back nasal, in place of which the *e*-type and *o*-type responses were assumed respectively.

**10. In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say *bijela svijeća* (white candle)?**

- a) bijela svijeća
- b) bela sveča
- c) other (please write) \_\_\_\_\_

**11. In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say *ruka* (hand)?**

- a) ruka
- b) roka
- c) other (please write) \_\_\_\_\_

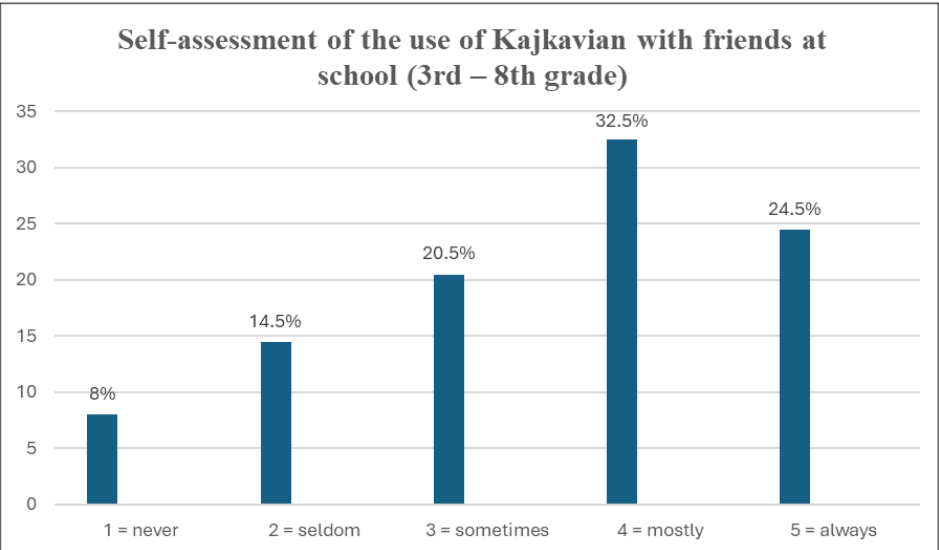
Some of the students' responses were interpreted with caution, as the variants were not pertinent for the examination of a particular feature. A good example of this is the response 'mali nos' (small nose) or 'drobni nos' (tiny nose) to the question eliciting the diminutive of *nos* (nose), i.e., whether students use the suffix *-ek* or *-ić*, which is also found in other, non-Kajkavian local dialects. Questions to which students provided their own solutions abounded with unexpected responses. As an example, in (morphological) question 24 we have encountered two obstacles to the correct interpretation. Students were asked to translate the following sentence into their local idiom: *Na stolovima je hrana*. (There is food on the tables). Initially we intended to gauge the presence of conservative or innovative plural endings, as well as the preservation of the phoneme *h* on the example of the word *hrana* (food). A part of the responses was excluded from further morphological analysis because the students used LSG instead of LPL (*na stolu*, on the table), which is probably due to them being focused on the content or fatigued. There were also responses with the following format: *Na stoli/stolima/i dr. je za jesti* (There is something to eat on the table/tables/etc.), precluding the analysis of the status of phoneme *h* due to the use of a local expression. In other parts of the questionnaire, we have also come across solutions we did not foresee, which only confirms the urgent need for a dialectological study – descriptions of local dialects analysed that will shed light on their characteristics and form the basis of future comparisons along the older – newer tangent.

### 3. Results of selected variables

Below are the results of selected variables – students’ self-assessment of their linguistic behaviour based on the first subquestion of task 7, and the following: reflex of schwa, reflex of the *\*st’* consonant cluster, inflectional morpheme in GPL of nouns of all three genders, formation of the diminutive (use of the suffix *-ek*), position of clitic, and the use of the lexeme with the meaning ‘rabbit’.

#### 3.1. Self-assessment of linguistic behaviour

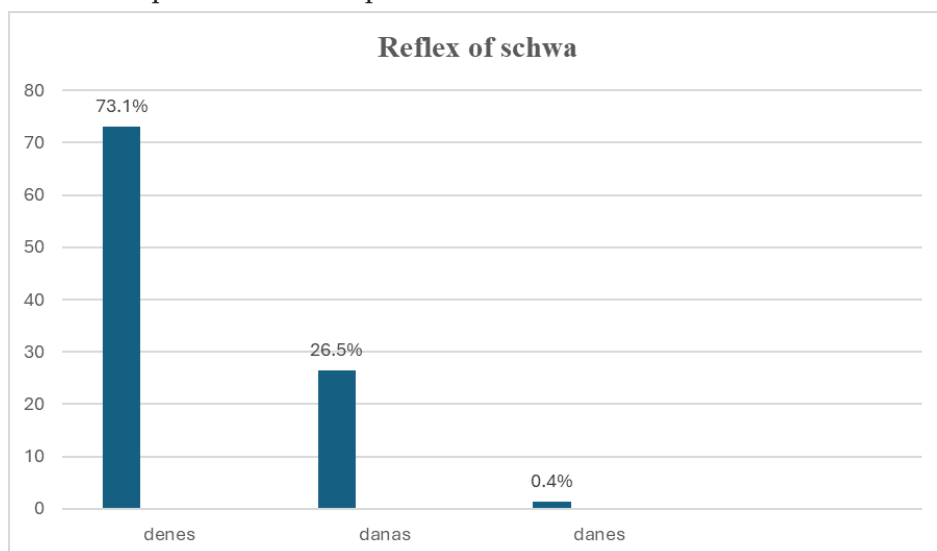
Self-assessment of linguistic behaviour was based on the first subquestion of task 7: *How often do you use Kajkavian – at school with friends?* Although there were a total of 23 students in the younger participants (1st and 2nd-graders) group, only 20 replies were included for analysis, as three questionnaires contained duplicate, opposing replies (for example, both the replies 2 = seldom and 4 = mostly were selected). The results are the following: 1 = never (7 students / 35%); 2 = seldom (7 students / 35%); 3 = sometimes (2 students / 10%); 4 = mostly (3 students / 15%); 5 = always (1 student / 5%). In the older participants category (3rd – 8th grade, N = 249), the results suggest a positive attitude towards the use of Kajkavian: 1 = never (20 students / 8%); 2 = seldom (36 students / 14.5%); 3 = sometimes (51 students / 20.5%); 4 = mostly (81 students / 32.5%); 5 = always (61 students / 24.5%).



## 3.2. Phonological variables

### 3.2.1. Reflex of schwa

Reflex of schwa was investigated in question 8: *In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say 'danas' (today)?* Students could choose between one of three possible replies: a) *danas*, b) *denes* and c) other (with the option of writing their own reply). Based on a sample of 249 participants, the results have shown that a smaller number of students (66 students, 26.5%) use the Štokavian-influenced variant *danas*, while most of them use the *e*-type reflex variant *denes* (182 students, i.e., 73.1%). The third option was found in only one questionnaire, where a student from Stubičke Toplice chose the option *danes*.



### 3.2.2. The reflex of the \*st' consonant cluster

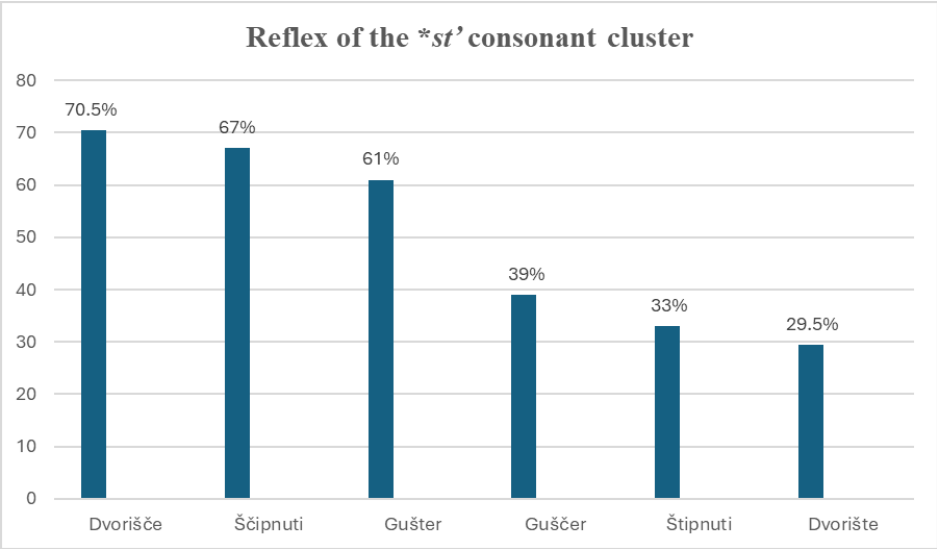
Due to numerous mutually opposing replies, this variable was particularly challenging for statistical analysis. The stability of this important consonant feature, Šćakavism,<sup>7</sup> was investigated in question 15: *In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say the words štīpnuti (pinch), gušter (lizard) and dvorište (yard)?* Alongside Šćakavian, i.e., Šćakavian reflexes, the third possibility under c) other

<sup>7</sup> With regards to consonants, Kajkavian local dialects of Croatian Zagorje typically preserve the middle palatal affricate č (see Chapter 1.1.), so in the remainder of the paper we will be referring to Šćakavism. Naturally, under c) students wrote options with the affricate č, and since the study was adapted for younger participants, b) contains more general options as well: šćīpnuti, gušćer and dvorišće.

enabled the students to write other options, which frequently resulted in unexpected combinations (*ščeknuti*, *gušter*, *dvorišče*; *štipnuti*, *gušter*, *dvorišče*, etc.). For a better overview, the results for the \**st*' consonant cluster are summarised in the table below:

	Donja Stubica N = 42	Gornja Stubica N = 76	Marija Bistrica N = 64	Oroslavje N = 36	Stubičke Toplice N = 31
<i>štipnuti</i>	šč: 25 št: 16 other: <i>čehnuti</i>	šč: 54 št: 22	šč: 54 št: 9 other: <i>ocehnuti</i>	šč: 16 št: 20	šč: 18 št: 13
<i>gušter</i>	šč: 16 št: 26	šč: 40 št: 36	šč: 25 št: 39	šč: 8 št: 28	šč: 9 št: 22
<i>dvorište</i>	šč: 29 št: 13	šč: 56 št: 20	šč: 55 št: 9	šč: 15 št: 21	šč: 21 št: 10

The table shows that the verb *štipnuti* mostly has Ščakavian reflexes (67%), the noun *gušter* is predominantly Štakavian (61%), while the example *dvorište* favours Ščakavism (70.5% of Ščakavian and 29.5% Štakavian reflexes). In view of this data, we can conclude that the lizard is not an animal the students encounter on a daily basis and that the prevalence of Štakavism in this word is most likely due to this lexeme being adopted from another linguistic system.

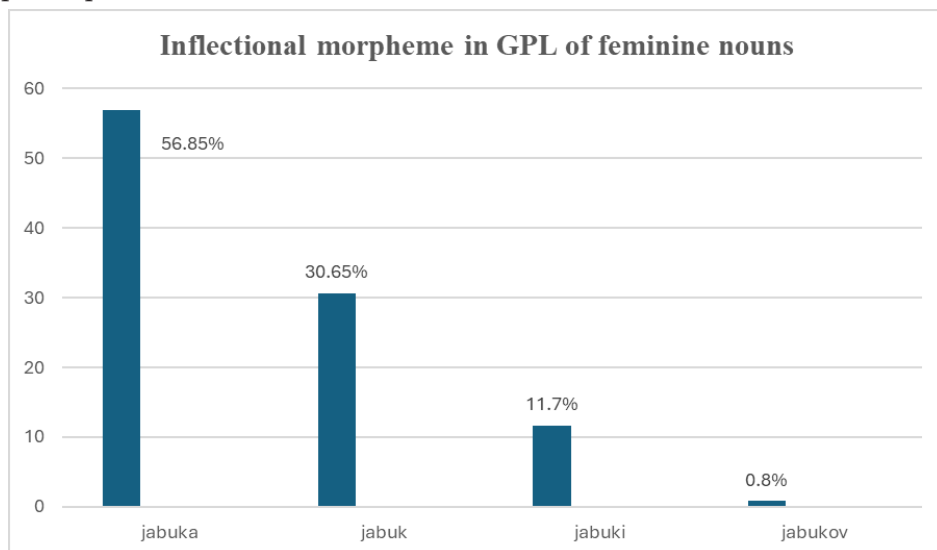


### 3.3. Morphological variables

In terms of morphology, the results pertaining to the inflectional morpheme in GPL of all three genders are presented.

#### 3.3.1. GPL of feminine nouns

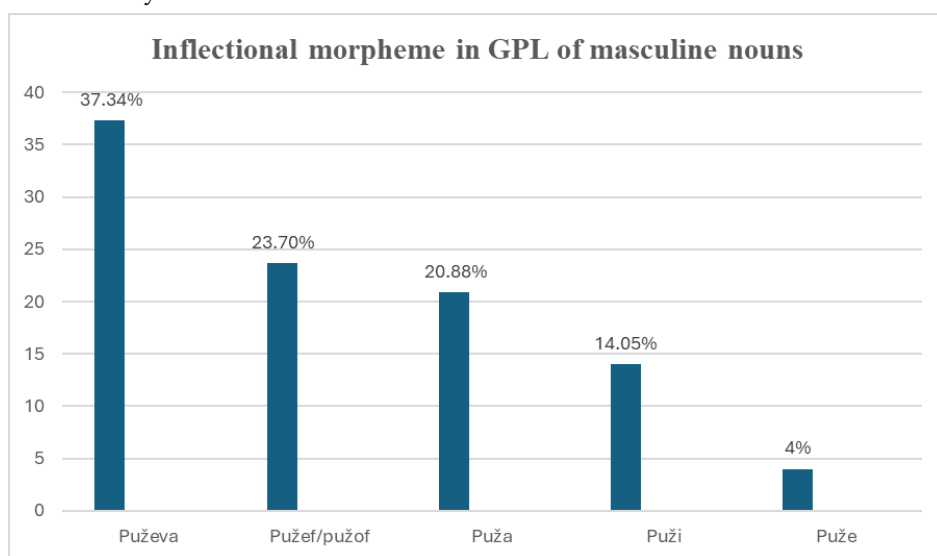
The state of this variable in feminine nouns was investigated in question 20: In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say *Imam sedam jabuka* (I have seven apples)? Of 248 students (1 questionnaire had no solution), 141 students opted for the variant with the morpheme *-a* (*jabuka*), 76 students chose the null morpheme variant (*jabuk*), 29 the one with the morpheme *-i* (*jabuki*), and only 2 students offered solutions ending in *-ov* (*jabukov*). Such distribution of results demonstrates the prevalence of replies containing the innovative morpheme for more than half of the participants.



#### 3.3.2. GPL of masculine nouns

The inflectional morpheme of masculine nouns was investigated in question 21: In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say *U vrtu je puno puževa* (There are many snails in the garden)? The analysis of results has shown the following: Solutions with the innovative inflectional morpheme *-a* (*puževa*, 93 replies) are the most prevalent. This includes also the 52 replies without the non-inflectional morpheme *-ev-*, i.e., the variant *puža*. A smaller number of students wrote conservative forms with the null morpheme (*pužof*, *pužef*, *pužuf*), and in 59 of these we

have also included the lexical variant *sluzivcef*. Finally, we consider the 10 replies with *puže* to also be confirmations of the older variant, and we deduce their origin on the basis of elision of final *-v* or *-f* (depending on consonant distribution rules within a particular local dialect). A fewer number of replies pertain to examples with the morpheme *-i* originating from former *i*-stems, 35 of them. The largest number of examples with the innovative morpheme (type *puževa*) was found in questionnaires filled in by students from PS Oroslavje: 23 students chose that form. Among these, four students wrote the variant *puža*, and only 9 replies pertain to older variants (*pužov/puži/pože*). Such distribution of results confirms our initial hypotheses in regard to a stronger influence of outside dialects on the speech of elementary class students (in this case, 3rd and 4th-grade students), but since the remainder of the questionnaires demonstrated a high level of innovativeness at other linguistic levels, further research might be necessary. Based on the results at this stage of the study, the graph below displays a significant loss of older features in the variable under study:

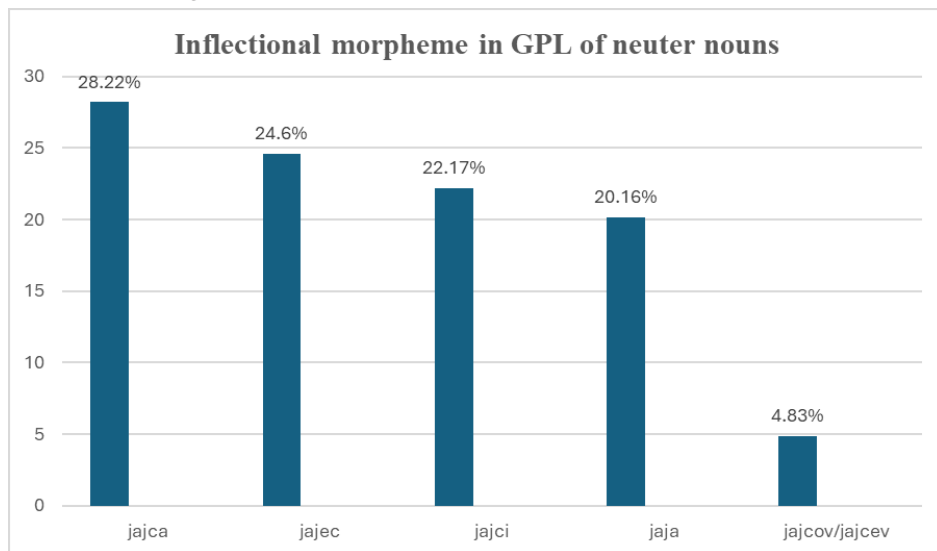


### 3.3.3. GPL of neuter nouns

Finally, in question 22 (*In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say 'U kolač ide 5 jaja' (The cake requires 5 eggs?)*), we wanted to determine the distribution of the inflectional morpheme in GPL of neuter nouns. In this case the analysis<sup>8</sup> has also shown the prevalence of forms

<sup>8</sup> In one questionnaire there was no reply to question 22, so this feature was studied on a sample of 248 participants.

with the inflectional morpheme *-a*: A total of 70 replies pertain to *jajca* and 50 to *jaja*. In second place, however, is the conservative form *jajec* (in a very small number of replies as the variant *jajac* with the vocal *a* in place of schwa) with 61 replies. The form *jajci* was confirmed in 55 questionnaires (taking, thus, the 3rd spot), while the form *jajcov* (with different morphonological variants: *jajcov*, *jajcev*, *jajcuv*) was found in only 12 questionnaires. Again, questionnaires filled in by the PS Oroslavje group (24 solutions with the morpheme *-a*, 13 of which as *jaja*, and 11 as *jajca*; there were a total of 36 participants in Oroslavje) stand out in terms of prevalence of newer forms. On the other hand, most older forms with the null morpheme (type *jajec*) are recorded in questionnaires filled in by the PS Marija Bistrica group (the first spot in this corpus goes to the form *jajci* with 26 instances; followed by *jajec* with 25 instances). The distribution of results by percentage points is the following:

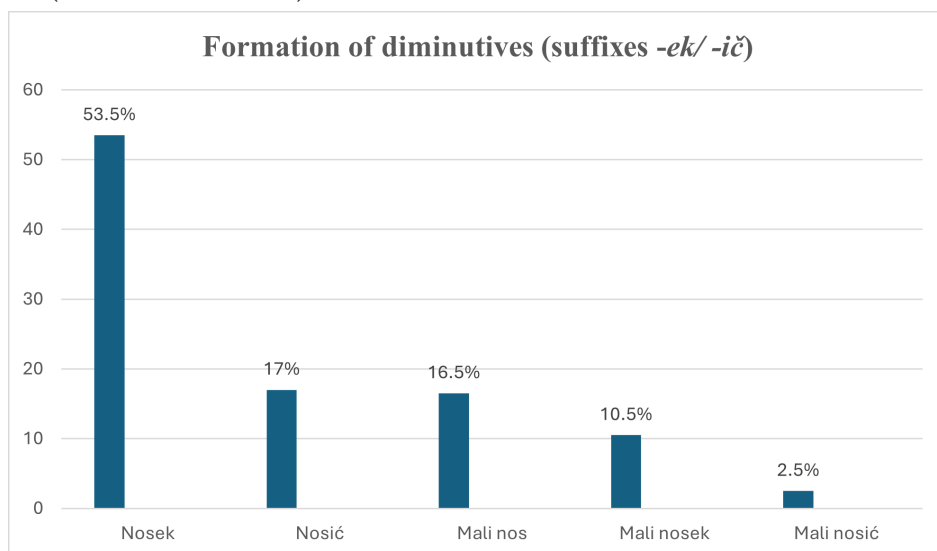


### 3.4. Word formation variable

In the study of word formation procedures, emphasis was placed on the formation of diminutives. We will present here the replies to question 32 – *Kako biste rekli za mali nos* (How would you say little nose)? – whereby we wanted to confirm whether students still prefer the Kajkavian suffix *-ek*. On a sample of 241 participants (8 questionnaires contained no reply to this question), the results are as follows: Most students (129 students, 53.5%) opted for the use of the suffix *-ek*,<sup>9</sup> i.e., the use of the diminutive

<sup>9</sup> Suffix *-ek* reflects also the reflex of schwa in the *e*-type vocal, which is in line

*nosek*; to this result we can also add replies of the analytical type, namely the reply *mali nosek*, which was opted for by a smaller number of students (25, 10.5%). In second place is the diminutive *nosić* with the suffix *-ić*<sup>10</sup> (41 results, 17%), to which we can also add *mali nosić* that was chosen by the smallest number of students (6 students, 2.5%). Third place goes to *mali nos* (40 students, 16.5%).

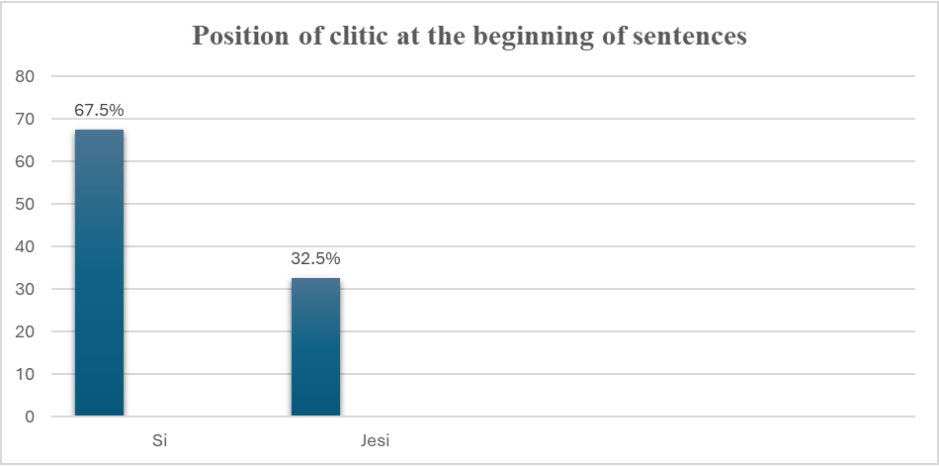


### 3.5. Syntactic variable

The results of the syntactic variable show that the participants still frequently use a clitic at the beginning of sentences. To the question *In conversation with friends or a family member, how would you say 'Jesi me čuo?'* (Did you hear me?), most students (168, 67.5%) opted for the reply with the clitic *si*: *Si me čuo/l?* A large number of these replies was accompanied by the particle *A* or *E*, which suggests that students really got immersed into the dialogue format and asking questions in real time: *E si me čul? / A si me čul?* A smaller number of students (81 students, 32.5%) wrote the reply that syntactically correlates with standard language norms: *Jesi me čuo/l?*

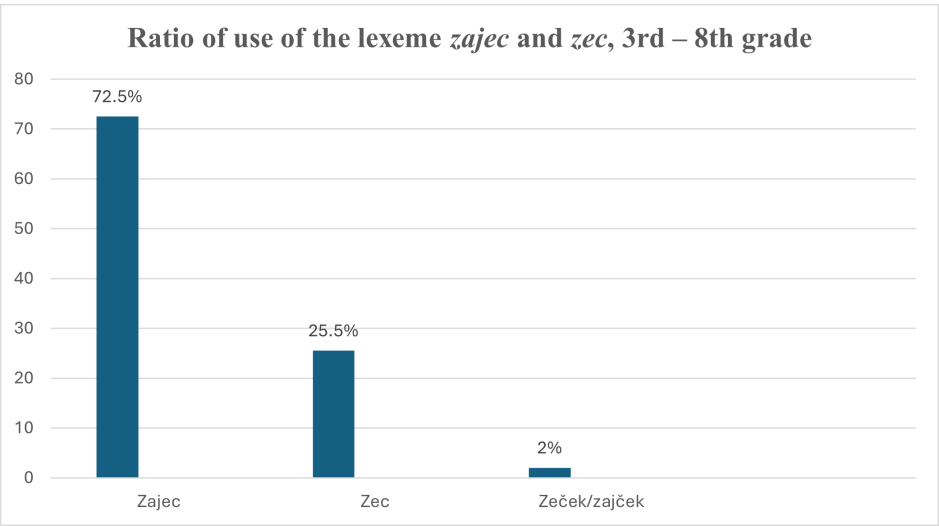
with results of studies of this variable, see Chapter 3.2.1.

<sup>10</sup> See note 7. For *nosić* and *mali nosić*, students wrote variants with both affricates of the standard language, *č* and *ć*.



### 3.6. Lexical variable

In both questionnaires, the lexeme 'zec' (rabbit) was placed in the pictorial part. A common lexical question was selected to ensure comparability between all participants, including students of the first two grades. Unlike other questions (at all levels), this task was solved in all questionnaires analysed. In the 3rd to 8th grade category, this question was replied to by 249 participants: 181 students wrote *zajec* (~ 72.5%), 63 students opted for *zec* (~ 25.5%), while only 5 students chose diminutives *zeček* and *zajček* (2%). Shown as percentage points, the graph demonstrates a high prevalence of the dialectal lexeme:



The situation is similar for 1st and 2nd-grade students: Of 23 participants, only two opted for *zec*. Therefore, the lexeme *zajec* comprises 91% of replies in this group.

### 3.7. Discussion of results

The results of the variables analysed suggest the following initial conclusion: If all data is compared, in the category of 3rd to 8th-grade students, the dialectal, Kajkavian features, as expected, are best preserved at the level of lexis. Furthermore, students in the first two grades also show a significant degree of preservation of Kajkavian variants of lexemes.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Kajkavian variants of the reflex of schwa and the \**st'* consonant cluster (studied on the examples *dvorišće* and *ščipnuti*) also figure significantly in the participants' replies. On the other hand, older (Kajkavian) morphological particularities are found to be less preserved. Significant presence of the morpheme *-a* in GPL of nouns of all three genders demonstrates that, unlike others, the morphological level is most susceptible to loss of conservative features. Indeed, this was our initial hypothesis, namely that students have the highest awareness of Kajkavian at the level of lexis, prompting them to consciously and spontaneously choose those lexemes they perceive as local from their linguistic experience, whether used by them or older family members. In addition, students found it easier to write a lexeme different from its standard language equivalent than an alternate form of some word (especially one that is also present in the standard language, such as the word *jabuka*, based on which the GPL of feminine nouns was studied). In line with this, in subsequent research stages questions will be modified so as to prompt the use of lexical dialectisms, i.e., words that are used only in the localities studied, with no standard language equivalent. In this way, we will try to avoid automatic and spontaneous use of standard language morphology. Apart from that, morphological questions pertaining to inflectional morphemes in nominal declension were designed per the principle of independent entry of textual responses, without the possibility of choosing among pre-selected solutions, which additionally resulted in responses mirroring the influence of standard language, as opposed to circling solutions among which Kajkavian ones are easily identified and perceived by students as features of their local dialect.

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<sup>11</sup> However, due to the necessary intervention of teachers during completion of the questionnaire, conclusions concerning the results of youngest participants should be made with caution.

Poorer preservation of older Kajkavian features, especially in morphology, is particularly expressed in elementary class students. The reasons for this lie in extralinguistic factors and methodological constraints of the study. Since local dialects are oral idioms, participants were not used to writing dialectal forms, which is why some dialectal data is lost from spoken to written word. Given the right circumstances, the study should be conducted so as to allow the students to utter the solutions, which would then be written down by the researcher. Such an approach would resolve many questions unanswered by the analysis of questionnaires in the present study, for example, solutions with both Šćakavian and Šćakavian reflexes (see note 10). Ultimately, it would provide insight into prosodic features of the speech of younger participants. Finally, in their education, older students have on multiple occasions had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with Croatian dialects, so their awareness of their value was more developed, and they had a more positive and confident attitude towards their own native speech.

#### 4. Conclusion

The awareness of the need to preserve one's native speech as the basis of local identity has been strengthened in recent years by teachers' efforts in organising extracurricular activities, as well as numerous popular-scientific and cultural events taking place in local settings. Institutional support also plays a big part in this. However, there are many factors that cancel out the results of these initiatives (population migrations, strong influence of the more prestigious standard language, etc.), which can also be seen in studies with older participants within so-called traditional dialectology, i.e., dialectology that aims to outline the oldest layers of Croatian local dialects. The discrepancy between theory and practice is, therefore, visible in the actual state of affairs in the field. Despite the steps taken, linguistic changes affecting conservative Kajkavian local dialects happen quickly and override efforts to preserve this segment of intangible heritage, especially when it comes to younger speakers.

Prior to conducting subsequent stages of the study, the questionnaire needs to be re-evaluated in terms of eliminating superfluous questions or questions shown to be unintelligible to or inappropriate for students, while adding those that are most informative, in particular taking into account characteristics of the local dialects under study.<sup>12</sup> This requires consultations

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<sup>12</sup> For example, during the expansion of the study to other schools in Croatian Zagorje, which we plan to conduct in subsequent stages of the Project, question 28

with those most familiar with the dynamics and circumstances of the teaching process, teachers – collaborators, who in this case represent an indispensable link between the students' speech and the dialectologist. Of crucial importance are also previous studies within classical dialectology, based on which we can continue researching changes in children's speech. This paper, thus, presents preliminary results that will, in further studies with an adapted questionnaire, probably obtain different results, namely a different ratio of dialectal and standard language solutions.

The aim of further analyses is to encompass as many variables as possible and, in particular, connect the first part of the questionnaire, dealing with linguistic self-assessment, with the second part in order to determine to what extent are students' linguistic practices influenced by those of their family environment and immediate social circle. Within a broader perspective, a more comprehensive aim is to extend the study to other schools in Zagorje and the wider Kajkavian area,<sup>13</sup> as well as to secondary-school-students, which will surely provide a fresh outlook on the state of preservation of dialectal features within the school population.

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pertaining to assimilation of Genitive and Accusative forms of singular masculine nouns for inanimate referents, also known as Slavonism in the dialectological literature, will be excluded from the questionnaire. The analysis of responses in this study has shown that as many as 89% of students do not use this feature in their speech, while only 11% do. Dialectological field studies in Zagorje have also not found this feature, so while acknowledging the different causes of such a result (non-native family origin, influence of media whereby students have come into contact with this feature and gotten the impression it was 'Kajkavian, locally-tinged', uncertainty during task completion...), a smaller part of students' positive responses was not considered relevant.

<sup>13</sup> In many areas of life, Stubica and its surroundings are influenced by nearby Zagreb, which is why reasons of linguistic changes should also be looked for in this extralinguistic fact.

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## Očuvanje dijalektnih značajki u jeziku djece osnovnoškolskoga uzrasta na stubičko-oroslavsko-marijabistričkom području Hrvatskoga zagorja

### Sažetak

U radu se daje pregled rezultata istraživanja provedenog 2024. u okviru projekta *Kajkaš KAJ?* Istraživanjem su bili obuhvaćeni učenici 5 osnovnih škola na stubičko-oroslavsko-marijabistričkom području Hrvatskoga zagorja, a glavni je cilj bio utvrditi koliko djeca osnovnoškolskoga uzrasta rabe dijalektni izričaj u svakodnevnim govornim situacijama, a koliko su pod utjecajem hrvatskoga standardnog jezika i/ili supstandardnih varijeteta. Istraživanje je provedeno pomoću posebno koncipirana upitnika. Rezultati analize odabranih varijabli pokazuju da je među najmlađim ispitanicima dijalektni izraz najbolje očuvan na leksičkoj, a najslabije na morfološkoj razini. Na takve je rezultate utjecalo više čimbenika: metodološke postavke istraživanja, učeničko poimanje leksika kao jezične razine koja je najrazlikovnija u odnosu na standard i dr. Uz prikaz inicijalnih i preliminarnih rezultata prve faze istraživanja, u radu se opisuju i neke metodološke zapreke koje će se pokušati prevladati u narednim fazama provedbe projekta.

Ključne riječi: jezik učenika osnovnoškolskoga uzrasta, kajkavsko narječje, jezična konvergencija, Hrvatsko zagorje

Keywords: language of primary-school-age students, Kajkavian dialect, linguistic convergence, Croatian Zagorje