

# **COMMUNICATIVE-HUMANISTIC APPROACH TO LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CROATIAN LANGUAGE CLASS**

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**T**his paper deals with an introduction of the communicative humanistic approach in education. It discusses the possibilities of a more efficient and appropriate use of new methods, techniques and teaching principles of elementary school instruction of the Croatian language in the post – war situation. The results show that this approach brought about better educational effects and, which is also important, produced positive attitudes and feelings towards the language lesson. Any approach yielding in such results is welcome, although additional investigation should be performed. The experiment should be repeated under different conditions and with a larger sample.

## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**he educational system in general, and especially the language learning system can be treated as a way of communication, an information process, i.e. a process of sending and receiving messages (Herriot, 1971; Težak, 1980; Widdowson, 1985; Rosandić, 1993).

Successful language communication is always determined not only by internal factors (linguistic subject and didactic matter) but also by external factors (non-linguistic, mainly social and psychological matter). Many of these, particularly non-linguistic factors, were present in Croatian schools in the last few years.

The aforesaid facts demanded for a special way of learning, with new lingual-methodological and pedagogical-psychological standpoints in the presentation and reception of the Croatian language in elementary school. The aim was to upgrade professional skills for teaching and to affirm some new methods of Croatian language learning in post-war situations, with particular reference to shortened curriculum, efficient educational effect and, generally, more pleasure in learning.

In order to develop the learning process three central aspects of pupil engagement in the activity of learning must be considered:

1. *Attentiveness* relates to the ways in which teachers can elicit and maintain high levels of pupil attention through varying learning activities or getting pupils actively involved.

2. *Receptiveness* relates to pupils' motivation and willingness to learn. It depends on the ways in which teachers can elicit curiosity, offer opportunity for success etc.

3. *Appropriateness* means that the learning experience must be appropriate for the desired learning to take place (Howe, 1984; Klauer, 1985).

Unless these criteria are met, pupils are unable to learn properly and teaching is ineffective. Some children are bored, some are not interested in the problem, some consider teaching subjects useless or meaningless, and some experience lack of concentration. In any case, educational effects are less than expected.

It is therefore essential to try to persuade teachers to change their teaching methods in such a way that pupils become more active and teaching issues more personally relevant (Deller, 1991; Harmer, 1992; Težak, 1996).

Because of the special post-war situation in elementary schools in Croatia, we have intended to point out a possible communicative creative model of learning based on humanistic education. We have affirmed a new so-called communicative humanistic approach in Croatian language learning. We are aware, of course, that it is not possible to implement such a model completely. That is why we have decided to plan a few lessons using the communicative humanistic approach in order to demonstrate its effectiveness. We will here present our pilot study.

## **THE COMMUNICATIVE HUMANISTIC APPROACH**

In accordance with the educational purpose of learning and teaching of art and humanities at elementary school, together with contemporary curriculum theories (Beauchamp, 1983; Moller, 1992) that have started being respected in The Republic of Croatia (Poljak, 1990), the communicative methodological pattern has two basic tasks:

- establishing, as far as possible, oral and written student communication, as well as verbal orientation in everyday life situations;
- development of listening, speaking, reading, writing, as well as remembering, understanding and deducing as basic language activities and cognitive abilities.

The communicative method classifies teaching material into thematic units as the basic units of methodological system, every teaching unit being presented to students as a communicative situation (Widdowson, 1985; Norman, 1986), adequate and familiar to the children of certain age, pre-knowledge, experience and psychophysical abilities (family socializing, school events, festivities, journeys). Communication of any kind is in the center of the educational process. Such orientation has gained its theoretical scientific basis in recent theories of communication, reception and information.

The basic form of approach in communicative methodology pattern is playing as an activity immanent to children. Accompanied by pleasure and positive feelings, children with less effort and in a shorter period acquire a bigger amount of information. Thus, learning is acquired unconsciously, while playing, and the educational effect appears as a secondary element. Even the most boring content, if formed and presented as a didactic game, becomes acceptable to students.

Of course, every communicative situation, as well as its belonging exercises in the form of game, must be in accordance with basic didactic rules: adequacy, systemacy, attractiveness, diversity, individuality, informativity, and adapted to the student's psychological, emotional, social, intellectual and cultural experience. Learning, within the process, is based on the inductive method, but without "ex cathedra" presentation, theorizing, learning definitions or paradigms by heart. Individuality, creativity and independent work are stimulated, and the teachers are expected to fully participate.

Thus, a concise characterization of the communicative creative methodological model would include the following basic definitions: *functional language communication* (Littlewood, 1981; Widdowson, 1985), *playing as a form of teaching*, *development of personal identity*, *a pluralism of methodological procedures*. Apart from making learning easier to children, such education and teaching will also be heterogeneous, dynamic, unстереotypic and, what is specially important, interesting to pupils. Amazing feedback can be received from children, only, they should previously be motivated in a proper way. Communicative approach has proved itself very adequate, especially if we take into consideration the situation in Croatian schools and the war-torn country.

Communicative approach has many elements of humanistic education. As G. Moskowitz (1978) put it "humanistic education is related to a concern for personal development, self-acceptance, and acceptance by others, in other words, making students more human". It is concerned with educating the whole person – the intellectual and the emotional dimensions. Medgyes (1986, cited in Stevick, 1991), in the context of language teaching, says: "In both the Humanistic-Psychological Approach and the Communicative Approach, learners are seen not so much as full-time linguistic objects at whom language teaching is aimed, but rather as human individuals whose personal dignity and integrity, and the complexity of whose ideas, thoughts, needs, and sentiments, should be respected".

Roberts (1982, cited in Stevick, 1991) speaks of "the humanistic/psychological" or "whole-engagement" approach, a term that for him covers a range of methods and techniques which share at least two significant assumptions: a) that the affective aspects of language learning are as important as the cognitive aspects, and therefore the learner should be treated in some sense as a "whole person"; b) that the answers to language learning problems are more likely to come from psychology than from linguistics.

According to humanistic approach teaching conditions can be improved in a variety of ways. Rogers (1969) makes the following general suggestions for humanistic teachers:

- build on problems that students perceive as real – the teaching material should be linked to students' personal problems and teaching issues should be made personally relevant,
- provide resources: books, films, tools, special equipment should be made available to the students,
- use contracts – in large classes teachers can make agreements with each student about the amount and kind of work that he will do,
- vary the use of class time – Rogers urges teachers to vary their use of scheduled time as much as possible and in particular to give students more responsibility for their use of time,
- use varied teaching methods

There are a few objective reviews of humanistic education. Research shows that students in such programs perform academically as well as or slightly less well than do children in more traditional programs, but their attitudes toward learning often seem to be more positive (Gage, 1978; Peterson, 1979.).

*The aim of the study* was to assess whether communicative humanistic approach to learning will result in better academic achievement related to this lesson and better feelings on the part of the pupils during the lesson. We also tried to affirm a new method of Croatian language learning in post-war situation so that language classes become diversified, appropriate and more interesting.

## **METHOD**

### **Procedure**

A typical school week was chosen for our study. Two classes (N = 42) of fourth-grade pupils (ten years old) were included. The second school hour of each day that week was reserved for the subject "Croatian language". The lessons were taught as it was planned, except for the lessons on Monday and Wed-

nesday. On Monday, after the lesson "Description" (oral and written description of person or thing) pupils had 45 minutes to write a composition with the same title. The lesson was presented in the same traditional way in both classes. On Wednesday the planned lesson of description ("Petar Pan") was presented in a traditional way in the control group (N=21), while in the experimental group (N=21) it was presented using communicative humanistic approach. After the lesson pupils again had 45 minutes to write a composition with the same title.

In that way we had a possibility of comparing control and experimental group (lessons on Wednesday presented in traditional and C approach), as well as experimental group with itself (lessons presented in traditional and C approach).

Each day, after the second lesson pupils completed a short questionnaire containing questions about their feelings during the previous lesson. Using the five-point Likert scale they had to indicate:

- was the lesson interesting,
- was the lesson difficult,
- how did the time pass,
- did they learn something about themselves,
- did they learn something about other pupils,
- to what extent were they feeling satisfied, tired, joyful and generally good.

The design of the study is presented in Picture 1.

**Picture 1**  
The design of the study

Day	E-group (second hour)	C-group (second hour)	E & C group	E & C group (third hour)
Mon	"My umbrella"  Traditional approach	"My umbrella"  Traditional approach	Question	written composition
Thur	"Peter Pan"  humanistic/comm. approach	"Peter Pan"  Traditional approach	Question	written composition

### Description of lessons

a) *Traditional approach* – The teacher began with the description of Peter Pan, based on the novel "Peter Pan" by J.M.Barrie. She was doing all the talking and pupils were mainly listening and writing down. At the end of the lesson the teacher asked a few questions and several pupils answered.

b) *Communicative humanistic approach* – The lesson started with the game which included both cooperation and competition. The class was divided into four groups. The members of each group had to cooperate in order to discover what was on the covered picture (it was the drawing of Peter Pan). The game was followed by a short cartoon entitled "Petar Pan". After that the lesson continued with pulling communicational cards from a hat. On each card one word was written and the pupil had to match it with one of Peter Pan's characteristics (e.g. curly – hair, brown – shoes). Each pupil had to pull one card and try to find the correct match.

The lesson ended with the following exercise. Each pupil had to imagine that he was to meet Peter Pan and to exchange with him two personal characteristics. The teacher posed a question: "Which two of your personal characteristics would you like to give to Peter Pan, and which two would you like him to give you?" The exercise was done orally with the participation of all children, but they were not forced to do it if they didn't want to (one pupil).

## RESULTS

We analyzed the following variables:

### I. Written composition

- a) number of words in written composition pupils wrote after each lesson
- b) ratio of complex and simple sentences in written composition

### II. Questionnaire

I. a) The average number of written words for E and C groups on both days is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
The average number of written words for E and C groups

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	136.30	55.60	285.55	95.59
Control group	106.27	43.12	149.44	47.12

A two way analysis of variance (A-group / B-day) with repeated measures on last factor was performed. The analysis produced three significant F ratios. (FA=21.63, P=.000; FB=74.99, P=.000; FAB=22.79, P=.000). Generally, the

experimental group had done better than the control group and the results were better the second time, on Wednesday. The significant interaction and inspection of means show that it is mainly due to the significant improvement of the experimental group under communicative humanistic approach. There were no significant differences (measured by Scheffe test) between C and E group on the first trial on Monday (although the experimental group was somewhat better). The control group obtained statistically the same results on the second trial (on Wednesday), while the experimental group significantly improved its achievement.

I. b) We divided the number of complex sentences each pupil wrote with the number of simple sentences. The two way analysis of variance (A-group, B-day) with repeated measures performed on these ratios produced no significant F ratios. (FA=.00, P=.99; FB=.20, P=.65; FAB=1.37, P=.25).

II. Questionnaire

1. *To what extent was the lesson interesting to you? (1-not interesting at all, 5-very interesting)*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**To what extent was the lesson interesting to you?**  
**(1-not interesting at all, 5-very interesting)**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	3.36	0.95	4.68	0.58
Control group	3.85	0.91	4.14	1.10

The two way analysis of variance (group/day) with repeated measures produced significant F ratio for factor "day" (FB=18.55, P=.0001) as well as significant interaction (FAB=7.67, P=.0086) while F ratio for factor "group" was not significant (FB=.01, P=.91)

The lessons on Wednesday were more interesting in both groups, but the significant interaction and inspection of means suggest that this is to a greater extent true in the experimental group.

2. *How did the time pass?*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**How did the time pass?**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	2.89	0.81	3.31	1.06
Control group	3.47	0.98	3.33	1.02

There were no significant differences between two groups in their ratings on Monday and Wednesday (FA=1.50, P=.22; FB=.55, P=.46; FAB=2.26, P=.14).

*3. Have you learned anything about yourself?*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Have you learned anything about yourself?**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	1.53	0.70	2.21	0.79
Control group	1.70	0.66	1.80	0.70

The two way analysis of variance (group/day) with repeated measures produced significant F ratio for factor "day" (FB=7.41, P=.009) as well as significant interaction (FAB= 4.11, P=.04) while F ratio for factor "group" was not significant (FA =.45, P= .50)

Inspection of means show that pupils reported to have learned more about themselves during the lesson on Wednesday, but the difference was greater for the experimental group.

*4. Have you learned anything about other pupils?*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 5.

There were no significant differences between two groups in their ratings related to lessons on Monday and Wednesday. (FA=.15, P=.70; FB=.24, P=.63; FAB=.03, P=.86).

**Table 5**  
**Have you learned anything about other pupils?**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	1.79	0.71	1.85	0.81
Control group	1.75	0.72	1.80	0.70

5. *To what extent was the lesson difficult for you? (1-very difficult, 5-very easy).*  
 Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
**To what extent was the lesson difficult for you? (1-very difficult, 5-very easy).**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	3.58	1.02	4.58	0.61
Control group	3.71	1.01	3.76	1.18

The two way analysis of variance (group/day) with repeated measures produced significant F ratio for factor "day" (FB=4.78, P=.03) as well as significant interaction (FAB=3.95, P=.05) while F ratio for factor "group" was not significant (FA=2.94, P=.09)

Inspection of means shows that pupils reported lessons on Monday to be more difficult than lessons on Wednesday, but the difference was greater for the experimental group. They perceived the lesson on Wednesday much more easier than pupils in the control group.

6. *To what extent were you satisfied with the lesson (1 – not satisfied at all, 5 – completely satisfied)*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 7.

The two way analysis of variance (group/day) with repeated measures produced one significant F ratio for factor "day" (FB=11.013, P=.0021) while F ratio for factor "group" was not significant (FA=.00, P=.97). Also, there was no significant interaction (FAB=.50, P=.48). Pupils in both groups were more satisfied with their lessons on Wednesday.

**Table 7**  
**To what extent were you satisfied with the lesson**  
**(1 – not satisfied at all, 5 – completely satisfied)**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	3.65	0.93	4.53	0.94
Control group	3.81	0.81	4.38	0.86

7. *To what extent did you feel tired after the lesson (1 – extremely tired, 5 – not tired at all)*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
**To what extent did you feel tired after the lesson**  
**(1 – extremely tired, 5 – not tired at all)**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	2.94	0.96	2.35	1.36
Control group	3.05	1.05	2.45	1.23

There were no significant differences between two groups in their ratings related to lessons on Monday and Wednesday. (FA=.20, P=.97; FB=3.69, P=.06; FAB=.00, P=.98).

8. *To what extent did you feel joyful during the lesson (1 – not joyful at all, 5 - extremely joyful)*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 9.

The two way analysis of variance (group/day) with repeated measures produced significant F ratio for factor "day" (FB=12.582, P=.001) as well as significant interaction (FAB=4.807, P=.03) while F ratio for factor "group" was not significant (FA=.00, P=.96).

Inspection of means shows that pupils in both groups reported to be more joyful during their lessons on Wednesday than on Monday, but the difference was

greater for the experimental group. They felt more joyful during their lesson on Wednesday than pupils in the control group.

**Table 9**  
**To what extent did you feel joyful during the lesson**  
**(1 – not joyful at all, 5 -extremely joyful)**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	3.26	0.99	4.47	0.84
Control group	3.71	0.84	4.00	1.04

9. *To what extent did you feel generally good during the lesson (1 – not good at all, 5 – extremely good)*

Mean values and standard deviations for two groups are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10**  
**To what extent did you feel generally good during the lesson**  
**(1 – not good at all, 5 -extremely good)**

Group	traditional approach in both groups		traditional (C) and H/C approach (E)	
	M	$\sigma$	M	$\sigma$
Experimental group	3.67	0.84	4.72	0.46
Control group	3.81	0.98	4.05	1.07

The two way analysis of variance (group/day) with repeated measures produced significant F ratio for factor "day" (FB=10.57, P=.002) as well as significant interaction (FAB=4.22, P=.047) while F ratio for factor "group" was not significant (FA=1.72, P=.20).

Inspection of means shows that pupils in both groups reported to feel better during their lessons on Wednesday than on Monday, but the difference was greater for experimental group. They felt better during their lesson on Wednesday than pupils in the control group.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Academic achievement**

Our first aim was to assess whether communicative humanistic approach to teaching a lesson will result in better academic achievement related to the lesson. The criteria for academic achievement were very simple – a) the number of words in written composition b) the ratio of complex and simple sentences in the composition.

The results showed that on Monday, when both groups were taught by traditional approach, there were no differences in the number of words in written composition between two groups. On Wednesday the number of words was significantly greater in the experimental group where pupils were taught by communicative humanistic approach.

However, we must say that the number of words in written composition was greater for both groups on Wednesday than on Monday. Perhaps the topic was more interesting to pupils or on Monday they were not yet involved enough. But, although both groups performed better on Wednesday, the improvement of the experimental group was significantly higher. But, since two classes were not completely comparable at the beginning of the study (experimental group performed better in control condition too) the improvement in the experimental group could be due to other factors. It is possible that students with higher verbal ability or higher initial knowledge react better to this kind of approach than other students

There were no significant differences in using complex vs. simple sentences neither on Monday nor on Wednesday.

Of course, the length of composition is only one (and not the most important) criterion of achievement. In fact, the increased number of words in written composition may as well be an indicator of involvement and motivation. That is why additional research with more specific criteria of academic achievement is needed.

### **Attitudes towards lessons**

There were no significant differences in attitudes between two groups on Monday. On Wednesday the experimental group (the one with communicative humanistic approach) perceived the lesson as more interesting, easier, they learned more about themselves, they felt more joyful and generally better. There were no differences between groups in assessing how the time passed, whether they learned something about other pupils or to what extent they felt tired after the lesson.

Again, we must say that both groups scored higher on these items on Wednesday than on Monday, but the difference was greater for the experimental

group. In addition to that, both groups reported to be more satisfied on Wednesday.

We may say that introduction of communicative humanistic approach in teaching a lesson, in these conditions, improved academic achievement related to the lesson. What is important too, this approach brought about more positive attitudes and feelings related to the lesson making it more interesting and generally easier to learn.

Of course, additional research should be performed under different conditions and with a larger sample for a general conclusion about its effectiveness in language instruction.

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## **KOMUNIKATIVNO-HUMANISTIČKI PRISTUP UČENJU I PODUČAVANJU U NASTAVI HRVATSKOG JEZIKA**

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**U** ovom tekstu predstavlja se komunikativno-humanistički pristup u obrazovanju. Raspravljaju se mogućnosti djelotvornijeg i prikladnijeg korištenja novih metoda, tehnika i načela podučavanja hrvatskoga jezika u osnovnim školama u poslijeratnom razdoblju. Analiza pokazuje da ovaj pristup daje bolje obrazovne rezultate i, što je također značajno, izaziva pozitivne stavove i osjećaje spram nastave jezika. Svaki pristup koji poboljšava rezultate nastave dobrodošao je, premda je potrebno obaviti i dodatna istraživanja. Eksperiment valja ponavljati u različitim uvjetima i na većem uzorku.

## **KOMMUNIKATIV-HUMANISTISCHER ZUGANG BEIM LERNEN UND LEHREN IM KROATISCHUNTERRICHT**

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**I**n diesem Text wird der kommunikativ-humanistische Zugang im Bildungsprozess vorgestellt. Erörtert werden Möglichkeiten zur wirksameren und angemesseneren Nutzung neuer Methoden, Techniken und Grundsätze im Kroatischunterricht an Grundschulen nach Beendung des Krieges. Die Analyse erweist, dass dieser Zugang bessere Lernerfolge bringt und – was ebenfalls bedeutsam ist – positive Einstellungen zum Sprachunterricht auslöst. Willkommen ist jeglicher Zugang, der den Unterrichtserfolg erhöht, obwohl weitere Forschungen natürlich unerlässlich sind. Das Experiment muss unter verschiedenen Bedingungen und in einer größeren Testgruppe wiederholt werden.