



Multilingualism as an advantage or an obstacle to the early acquisition of Croatian

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Abstract

One of the goals of the European Union's language policy is multilingualism and multiculturalism which contribute to creating a multilingual community. Research that was conducted in Croatian primary schools indicates that learning a foreign language positively affects the mother tongue acquisition, i.e. that parallel language codes are not an obstacle but rather an advantage in the process of acquiring standard Croatian language. Various factors influence children's early stages of language acquisition, like e.g. media a child is exposed to (cartoons in different languages, language of advertisements and of computer games), the environment in which a child is raised and most of all, speech models in the family (parents) and kindergarten (kindergarten teachers), the acquisition of, i.e. learning a second language to which a child is exposed being an additional factor of influence. It is, therefore, the aim of this paper, to examine the interference of parallel language codes of both related languages and those that are not related, but are dominant in a child's environment, with the process of Croatian language acquisition at the kindergarten and preschool age. 15 kindergarten and preschool children (aged 5 and 6) participated in the research and were examined by longitudinal process of monitoring and by short linguistic questionnaire designed for the purpose of the research with the topics of everyday life, colours and animals and a number of pictures were used to prompt children to tell a story orally. It was expected that there would be interference between foreign languages and the process of Croatian language early acquisition and a more significant influence of related Slavic languages and English as a *linguae francae*. Moreover, it was expected that the interference would not be a difficulty but rather an advantage for acquiring the mother tongue (Croatian).

Keywords acquisition of language, media, language in contact, Croatian language, multilingualism.

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1. Introduction

One of the goals of the European Union's language policy is developing multilingualism and multiculturalism that together lead to creating a multilingual community. In this context, it is expected from European speakers to use at least two languages: their mother tongue and one foreign language. Data collected by Eurobarometer statistics show that the most common language in the European Union is German (16%), then English (13%), French (12%), Spanish (8%), i.e. (EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). Polish. Interestingly one should point out, 54% of the citizens of the European Union can conduct a conversation in one foreign language, and 10% are able to do it even in three languages. Most often used second language is English (38%), followed by French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%). Acquiring at least two foreign languages besides your mother tongue is recommended in the *Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike: učenje, poučavanje, vrednovanje*³ (2005).

In most European countries acquiring foreign languages starts between the ages of six and eight, and in 2014 about 84% of European students learned at least one foreign language, which is a considerable difference in comparison with 2005 when 67% students were doing that. At the same time about 60% of European students in primary schools learned two foreign languages, whereby it was in most countries their choice to learn a second foreign language and not their obligation. Knowing the (multi) linguistic trends and tendencies in Europe, it is important to understand how these efforts towards multilingualism are reflected in the language policy of the Republic of Croatia. However, before offering an insight into that question, it is essential to understand the context.

Croatian language is, namely, the 24th official language of the European Union, and since it is a small language with a relatively small number of active speakers (about seven million), learning other languages is an important educational component of the curriculum. Moreover, through history and today still, the influence of other, in different periods differently dominant languages (Turkish, Italian, German and Hungarian) is inevitable, and today the predominant influence is that of the English language and the rest the anglicisms and globalism accompanying it and with IT industry supporting it, that is evident throughout the world.

1.1. *Acquiring the mother tongue (Croatian)*

The process of language acquisition starts as early as in the prenatal period when a child listening to the language in his/her environment starts acquiring it. There are recognisable milestones and developmental patterns present (or absent) in the process at expected developmental stages (Kuvač Kraljević and Kologranić Belić, 2015).

The prelinguistic stage lasts *to the end of the first year, i.e. until a child speaks its first meaningful word and it represents the hive of developmental activities* (Kuvač Kraljević and Kologranić Belić, 2015: 27). During that period a child communicates with his/her environment crying, laughing and by other non-verbal signs understanding more than producing language. Typical of the

³ *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*



prelinguistic stage are rhythmic logatomes that occur in pronunciation of a combination of simple consonants and vowels: *pa-pa, ba-ba, ma-ma, ta-ta*. Around the first year of age rhythmic logatomes acquire their first meaning. In the next linguistic stage, a child continues to develop his/her lexical system, at the same time making mistakes on phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. A child switches certain sounds, skips those that are difficult to pronounce or pronounces them incorrectly. He or she gradually acquires grammatical rules, generalising them and making mistakes on a morphological level, staying constantly within the system of the Croatian language.

Around the age of two a child pronounces first sentences that often resemble so called telegraphic speech, i.e. they lack uninflectable words, auxiliary verbs and emphatic pronouns. The first sentence most often consists of one or two words. Moreover, a child enriches his/her vocabulary using words in only one of their meanings or creates neologisms in order to fill his/her lexical gaps. One could say that around the age of three a child commands the base of the mother tongue and, according to estimates, has in his/her mental lexicon about 1 000 words. This number grows progressively with age and around the age of six, a child's vocabulary consists of about 10,000 words. Language acquisition is a spontaneous process and its success depends on a number of factors, for example the number of children in the family, the structure of the family, sex, environment and education of the parents, the amount of time that parents and relatives spend interacting with the child, social conditions in which the child is growing up and other factors.

There are numerous theories about early acquisition of language trying to answer the question of how a child acquires a language. Since it is a very complex process, theories addressing this question vary to a considerable degree. Each offers a part of the answer to this complex question and the rest of them are universal and apply to all the languages in the world. However, one should bear in mind that the language acquisition process is specific and depends on the features of a particular mother tongue.

We could agree with generativists (Chomsky, 1967, acc. to Jelaska, 2005) that all children are born with the same mind grammars but completing the mind map will depend on the exposure to and specifics of a particular mother tongue. We could, also, agree with the statements of behaviourists (acc. to Aladrović Slovaček, 2019) who claim that a child acquires language through imitation, but then one should consider the total language production of a child that could not have been heard in such a form ever before. What equally affects language acquisition is a child's environment as well as his/her cognitive abilities, i.e. thinking capacity. Description of Croatian language acquisition is based on the parents' records of three monolingual children and it is in the world base of children's language – CHILDES.

With regard to the fact that learning a foreign language starts in school, a question arises as to what happens in the early kindergarten and preschool period, i.e. what role do languages that children are exposed to have in their acquisition of their mother tongue, which continues, for Croatian, up to the seventh year of age. *Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum za predškolski odgoj i*

*obrazovanje te opće obavezno i srednjoškolsko obrazovanje*⁴ (2015) in the Republic of Croatia encourages and supports the development of eight key competences for lifelong learning among which communication in the mother tongue is the most important one, followed by communication in a foreign language (*Preporuke o ključnim kompetencijama za cjeloživotno učenje*⁵ (2006)). Communication in a mother tongue is strengthened by instructing children how to correctly express themselves orally and in writing: their thoughts, feelings, experiences in different activities that are purposeful and meaningful to them. Communication in a mother tongue includes developing a child's consciousness about the influence of language on others and the need to use language in a positive and socially responsible way. This competence is developed in such organisation of the educational process in kindergartens that is based on creating an encouraging language environment and encouraging children to socially interact with other children and adults in various ways.

On the other hand, a child in the early childhood and pre-school education learns a foreign language in groups that are formed especially for that purpose (most often English, German, French, Italian) or in kindergartens that specialise in teaching children a foreign language (French, German, Italian or a minority language). A foreign or a minority language is acquired in an encouraging linguistic context, through play or other activities with the same purpose of learning the language. Teaching a foreign language is woven into everyday educational activities of the kindergarten and does not take place through separately defined methodical procedures. Encouraging cross-cultural understanding and communication between children and other subjects in and outside of the educational facility contributes to the development of this competence.

Research (Pavličević Franić, 2005 and 2011) shows that both horizontal and vertical multilingualism occur already in the early language acquisition, i.e. children that enter the kindergarten with their own idiom, get to know other children's idioms and in this way become vertically multilingual, i.e. they are acquainted not only with different forms of their mother tongue (dialects), but also with a foreign language through media and various programmes taking place in and outside of the kindergarten. All of that, naturally, has a powerful impact on the process of a mother tongue acquisition.

1. 2. *Influence of the media on language acquisition*

Nowadays we cannot speak of language acquisition without connecting it to numerous other processes and situations that today's children are exposed to. Even though language acquisition process in the prelinguistic stage has the same phases in all the languages of the world, it will still be influenced not only by the structure of the language, especially its grammar, but also by numerous extralinguistic reasons. In conclusion, the influence of the media on children's language acquisition process is inevitable. Research (Jelaska, 2007) has shown that children of educated parents have somewhat better linguistic competences, children that attended kindergarten programmes for

⁴ *The National Curriculum Framework for Pre-School Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education*

⁵ *Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*



at least three years later have better reading competences (PIRLS, 2011), children who can use computers also have significantly better competences as well as children who have more varied and richer language input. However, even though most children do not learn a foreign language in early childhood and at the preschool age, they are still exposed to it through media, watching cartoons, following YouTubers and playing various computer games, so, in order to comprehend this problem, one should definitely consider the influence of the media that children are more or less exposed to every day. To what extent they are exposed to the media depends mostly on their parents' attitudes towards media and on how busy or able they are to spend quality time with their children.

Author Vandewater and the rest (2007) conducted a comprehensive research in America which included more than 1 000 parents who confirmed that their children who are not even two years old, spend a little more than two hours in front of the screen every day. Also, author De Decker et al. (2012) conducted a research about the amount of time preschool children spend in front of the TV. Six European countries were included in the research and the results differed to a great extent – from 20 minutes to 4 hours a day. German and Spanish children spend the least amount of time in front of the screen (20 – 30 minutes), in Greece it is half an hour to an hour and a half a day, whereas parents from Belgium, Poland and Bulgaria state that their preschool children spend from one to four hours a day in front of the screen.

Research that was conducted in 2017 in the Republic of Croatia included 653 preschool children whose parents completed a questionnaire on the influence of the screen on the life of their preschool child and on the children's and parents' habits during a week and on weekdays. The results showed that all preschool children use TV screens and that it begins before the age of two with children doing it more than two hours every day (Roje Đapić, Flander Buljan and Selak Bagarić, 2020). The authors emphasise that about 43% of preschoolers in the Republic of Croatia can use the Internet, 97% watch TV every day, 68% follow media content via their smart phones and the rest in some other way, all of which is a clear indication that the influence of media on language development is inevitable. Children choose media content mostly on their own although the American Pediatric Society recommends that they do it with the help and support of their parents. Since they choose the content themselves, they at the same time choose the language in which the content will be consumed and so they encounter new speech forms, idioms and different languages. To investigate to what extent this is the case and which languages they are exposed to is the crucial question of this research.

Research shows (acc. to Aladrović Slovaček, 2019) that too much time spent in front of the TV has as a consequence less interaction between the child and parents and other children. On the other hand, quality TV programmes can offer good speech models to children. Moreover, quality content on TV can provide models for new games with friends and children who watch multicultural programmes are more likely to play with children from other cultures, which enhances understanding and acceptance and increases tolerance.

Author Jasna Šego (2009) believes that programmes in dialectal speech and foreign languages enrich children's language and speech development, e. g. when children hear different words or different pronunciation of a word for an object, activity or occurrence that they know, it makes them more aware of the communicative function of the language. Unfortunately, television can also have a negative impact on children's language and speech development. If children watch it for too long, their linguistic abilities will become insufficient (prereading skills will be weaker, sentences too simple, and their interactions with peers and parents will be reduced). Most programmes intended for children up to the first year of age in English are completely appropriate if we consider their colours, movement and language simplicity, but psychologists emphasize that the presence of so many colours and movement will influence early emotional and social development in a negative way because they surround children with an unnatural situation to which they will get accustomed and later expect the same to happen in the world that surrounds them.

Still, most research on the influence of the media on language acquisition and development was conducted among school children. One such empirical study was conducted in the Netherlands where the Dutch is the official language and it was the aim of the researchers to compare the influence of three different media in English on the language of primary school children. The research showed that the students who watch TV programmes and films with subtitles show considerably better results in the tests of oral skills in English. Similarly, students who play computer games more often, as well as girls had better results in the knowledge of the English language (Kuppens, 2010). A Croatian the research shows (Pavličević-Franić and Aladrović Slovaček, 2017) that learning a foreign language positively affects the mother tongue acquisition, i.e. that parallel linguistic codes are not an obstacle in learning but an advantage in acquiring standard Croatian. It means that children that learn English or some other language as a second language think more about rules and communication in their mother tongue. So, that has positive effect on the process of learning Croatian language. All of that contributes to the basic educational goal of the European Union – nurturing multilingualism and multiculturalism as the fundamental values on which this community is founded.

1.3. *Bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism*

As already stated in the introduction, nurturing multilingualism is one of the educational and cultural goals of the European Union and it is therefore important to encourage learning at least one or possibly two foreign languages besides a mother tongue. The importance of acquiring a mother tongue is hereby not to be neglected since it is a precondition for learning other languages which is confirmed in the document *Preporuke o ključnim kompetencijama za cjeloživotno učenje* (2006). When we talk of multilingualism, in theory we encounter several different concepts. Most often the terms that are used are speaking two languages or bilingualism, which means knowing two languages in the identical way even though one language is the dominant one. It is most often the one used in the community in which



a child or a person lives. In short simple terms, bilingualism is the ability of speaking two languages (Trask, 2005).

Bilingualism can be individual but also a characteristic of the whole community in which two or more languages are regularly spoken. Author Trask (2005) states that more than 70% of the world population is bilingual or multilingual. The term multilingual or multilingualism implies the possibility to learn different languages in any educational institution or in various multicultural environments which need not interfere with each other (Pavličević-Franić, 2006), and plurilingualism implies interlinguistic connectedness, intertwining and interference of various linguistic codes in the same speaker who uses his existent language knowledge to acquire a new language (Pavličević-Franić, 2006; *Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike: učenje, poučavanje, vrednovanje*⁶, 2005).

Author Königs (2000, acc. to Jaić-Novogradec, 2017) differentiates between three kinds of individual plurilingualism: retrospective plurilingualism, which describes bilingual speakers who coming to class already have a considerable knowledge of the second language (L2 knowledge), retrospective and prospective plurilingualism, which describes speakers who are plurilingual and have advantage over other learners whereby neither of their languages is the language being taught. Through learning the third language those learners further develop their plurilingualism and prospective plurilingualism, which is characteristic for students who are monolingual coming to classes and who develop their plurilingualism by learning a foreign language at school. Prospective plurilingualism is the kind of plurilingualism typically present in most European schools, including those in the Republic of Croatia where, students starting school start learning one or more foreign languages and develop their plurilingualism mostly learning their first foreign language at school.

In conclusion, it is the main idea and goal of this research to examine to what extent exposure to other languages influences the process of Croatian language acquisition, be it in kindergartens, preschools or language schools which children at this young age attend, or through the exposure to media content that is most often in the form of cartoons, following youtubers and playing computer games.

2. Methodology

2.1. Description of research samples, instruments and methodology

15 children, seven boys and eight girls, from the ages of 4 to 7 participated in this research. All of them are monolingual and the rest of them learn English as a second language once or twice in a week. Children were selected purposefully (we know their parents and we have confidence that they will do it how we explain) in order to systematically record their speech in the course of three months, from September to December 2019. Their speech was recorded by their parents who followed a short instruction provided by the researcher. Parents were supposed to record all the words or utterances that a child produces in free speech and that do not belong to the system of

⁶ *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*

Croatian language. Apart from this longitudinal research during three months, each child was examined using storytelling cards. They were each offered six cards in different colours and they were asked to choose three cards from the six that they were offered. The children were then supposed to tell a story using these three cards. Researchers were prompting them and if they had difficulties telling a story or did not include pictures on their cards in their story, the researchers would ask them questions about the cards. Each card colour represented a category: place of action, a role, feelings, things, time and people. Each examinee was recorded and then his/her speech was transcribed and entered into NooJ – a linguistic computer program for text analysis. The corpus was date of first type of researching – transcripts of parent's recordings and second was data of recordings of stories of children that they talked by storytelling cards). We annotated words that we thought are important for our research. The data were processed using both the qualitative method of content analysis and the quantitative method using SPSS tests of parametric statistics: t-test, variance analysis, chi-squared test and the descriptive markers for every stated variable (age, sex) were defined. Moreover, children were in the research divided into two groups; kindergarten group (4 and 5 years of age) and preschoolers (6 and 7 years of age).

2.2. *Research goals and hypotheses*

The main research goal was to establish the influence of other languages that children are exposed to in the process of Croatian language acquisition. In accordance with this goal, the present study was designed to examine

1. the interference of parallel language codes of both related languages and those that are not related, but are dominant in a child's environment, with the process of Croatian language acquisition at the kindergarten and preschool age.
2. the characteristics of children speaking in early age phase (sentences, most frequent words, lexical diversity and lexical density).

In accordance with the goal mentioned above, the following research hypotheses were identified:

H1 – It is expected that parallel linguistic codes will appear, i.e. separate lexemes and phrases from languages that children are exposed to. The most powerful influence is expected to be that of the English language, especially on the lexical level, but also of the Serbian language on both lexical and grammatical level since numerous cartoons are synchronized in the Serbian language and of other Slavic languages. It does not mean that Children are bilingual or multilingual, it just confirms the influence of other dominant languages in medium or in context of living.

H2 – It is expected, with regard to the purposefully chosen sample, that the children will exhibit a high level of linguistic competence, i.e. linguistic knowledge and confidence. Therefore, a high level of lexical diversity (the ratio of variants and occurrences in the text) and density (the ratio of full words and



occurrences) is expected which means that the examinees have a broad vocabulary completely in accordance with their cognitive age. Their sentences are expected to be built respecting the syntactic rules of Croatian language and consisting of a number of words characteristic of their cognitive age and also that there will be some deviations on the stylistic level in speech and recorded utterances.

3. Findings and discussion

Examinees were, with regard to their answers, divided into two groups: kindergarteners – children aged 4 and 5 and preschoolers – children who are almost 6 or 6 years old. In spontaneous parents' notes there were mostly separate words that children used in free speech exchanging thereby the Croatian word, in naming colours in particular: *bijela* (white), *crna* (black), *smeđa* (brown), *narančasta* (orange), *crvena* (red), *plava* (blue) and *siva* (gray). Children would sometimes, talking about a picture or drawing or explaining what a toy or a person looks like, use the English word for a colour instead of the Croatian one. Doing that they would not apply the rules of Croatian grammar for the used word. They would not inflect it for instance, which can later be observed among primary school students. Here are some examples: *Imam brown (smeđeg) među* (I have a brown teddy bear.). *Neću obući tu majicu black (crne) boje* (I'm not wearing that black T-shirt.). *Mama, to je white* (Mom, it's white.). *Sunce je yellow* (The sun is yellow.). Apart from colours, children would also use English words to name animals (bear, polar bear, snake) but in naming animals one could observe some words that belong to Serbian: *lenjivac* (*ljenivac* – sloth), *lagano* (*ljenivac*), *sisar* (*sisavac* – mammal).

Considering the fact that the Serbian language is also a South Slavic language and similar to Croatian with regard to its lexical structure, children sometimes choose cartoons in Serbian or Bosnian, not knowing that these are different language codes. Watching cartoons about animals (*Wild Kratts* in particular), a child adopts some lexical terms that he/she does not have filled in Croatian language. For example the word *sisavac* (mammal in English) and *sisar* have, actually, the same root, but different suffixes, so that the child retained the Serbian word because he/she possibly had never heard the Croatian word. The child probably does not know the complete meaning of the word but knows what kind of animals it refers to in relation to the cartoon that he/she watches. Apart from the mentioned words, some others were recorded that children used because they had heard them in a cartoon: nouns: *makaze* (*škare* – scissors), e. g. *Daj mi te makaze!* (Give me those scissors!); *WC šolja* (*WC školjka-toilet*), e. g. *Idem na WC šolju.* (I'm going to the toilet.). Examples of recorded verbs are: *posmatrati* (*promatrati* – watch) – e. g. *Mama, vidi kako me pas posmatra!* (Mom, look at the dog watching me!). Children also use some words that exist in Croatian too, but are pronounced with different accent, e. g. *zubići*, *čudovište* in which instead of the short rising accent on the first syllable they use long rising accent on the second syllable in the word *zubići*, whereas in the word *čudovište* they use short rising accent on the second syllable instead of the short rising accent on the first syllable.

It is interesting that the interference of the English language is observed in counting as well since a lot of children start counting in English (mostly to

ten) instead of Croatian. This is especially appealing for young children who have only just started learning English. This interference of English is particularly evident in naming colours, counting and in using some other nouns that have entered Croatian as globalisms and have not been replaced in active speech, like for example the word shopping that is rarely used in the Croatian version *kupovanje* or *kupovina*. Consequently, we can sometimes hear interferences of the whole simple English sentences: *Mummy, let's go shopping, Let's start! Dance!, Clean up!, Be quiet!* and *Fly*. Apart from the mentioned phrases, the interference of English is evident in spontaneous speech as well where words like snowman instead of *snjegović*, laptop instead of *računalo*, book instead of *knjiga*, candy instead of *slatkiš* sometimes appear. All of the above examples demonstrate that children interfere that which they learn and they most often first learn numbers, colours, typical and frequent phrases like *Be quiet!* or *Clean up!* and some words that are connected to certain occasions or seasons like, e. g. snowman or Christmas, for instance in a sentence: *Mama, sada je Christmas (Mom, today is Christmas.)*. Another example is the word birthday, e. g. in the sentence: *Danas je Karlin birthday (Today is Karla's birthday)*.

The whole language acquisition process is characterized by filling the lexical gaps that a child has with new words. Sometimes they are words that a child uses in only one meaning that needs to correspond with the meaning that adults assign this particular word (for instance, a child may use for all four-legged animals the word dog – for a wolf and a fox as well...). However, a lot of children use so-called neologisms, i.e. new words. Some of them were recorded in this research: *putovnici (putnici - travellers)*, *stojiti (stajati - stand)*, *otopiti (utopiti - drown)*, *otklopac (poklopac - lid)*, *okopako (naopako - upside down)*, *galub (golub - pigeon)* and *pozviniti (pozvoniti - ring the bell)*. Moreover, they also use English words with Croatian endings, for instance: *prenkujem te (šalim se s tobom, zezam te - I am just joking with you.)* in which the English noun prank was given a Croatian verb form ending for the first person singular in the present tense *-jem*. It was observed that some children, who watch cartoons about little battle tanks sometimes use two Russian words: *babuška* and *deduška* in the meaning grandma and grandpa because they spend part of their time being exposed to Russian TV.

It could be said that, as a result of spontaneous observation, a significantly bigger number of words was recorded that do not belong to the corpus of Croatian due to the fact that children speaking spontaneously do not think about what and how they are going to say something and choose their words depending on the situation. However, if they are telling a story and are aware of the fact that their speech is being recorded, they very rarely use the Croatian word for a colour instead of the English word but they use neologisms when they lack words for naming a concept or a thing. All of that supports accepting the first hypothesis, i.e. the idea that the interference of other linguistic codes children are exposed to is evident, and significantly more so in spontaneous speech.

The second goal of the research was to examine lexical density and diversity of children's speech when telling stories, i.e. to establish some characteristics of their lexical development. With regard to the fact that children were divided in two groups: kindergarteners and preschoolers, it was observed that there



is not a statistically relevant difference in lexical diversity when telling stories with the help of storytelling cards. Namely, the results of the ratio between the total number of types and tokens show a very similar number: kindergarteners (0.63), preschoolers (0.65). Kindergarteners have in their sentences 6 words on average, which is in accordance with their age, whereas preschoolers have seven words in a sentence, quite consistent with their age. Interestingly, in texts they most often use coordinating conjunctions (*i*), contrasting ones (*a*), time conjunctions (*kad* or *onda*), and relative pronouns to connect sentences (*koji*). Their texts have 3-4 sentences on average, which is in accordance with their developmental age. Here are some examples: the child's name, age, number of sentences in the text, average number of words in a sentence and most often used connectors (in brackets):

- Marta, 6 years – 3-4 sentences
- Diego Emanuel, 4 years – 3 sentences
- Antea, 4 years – 3 sentences
- Lana, 7 years – 4 sentences, 7 words in a sentence (using *i*, *a*, *koji*)
- Jan, 6 years – 3 sentences, 7 words in a sentence (using connectors *i*, *a*, *koji*)
- Eva, 5 years – 3 sentences, 6 words in a sentence
- Andrija, 5 years – 5 sentences, 6 words in a sentence (using connector *kad* and *onda*)
- Grgo, 7 years – 4 sentences, 7 words in a sentence (using *koji*, *i*, *kad*).

Described, collected, and analysed data indicate that the second hypothesis which presupposes a high level of linguistic knowledge and confidence since the sample was purposefully chosen, can be accepted. Consistent with the expectations, the examinees demonstrated excellent lexical diversity in their speech, significant number of words in their texts and sentences and superb use of connectors. Comparing results that were collected for first-graders (Aladrović Slovaček 2019), these results show that the children's oral linguistic competence is on a high level. The obtained results were similar to the results of a research in which kindergarteners' and preschoolers' basic emotion expression was examined (Aladrović Slovaček, Čosić and Magašić, 2020). In these studies we show that children speak the most when they describe sadness, they have about six words in sentences and they use simple phrases and words when they started describe their feelings.

4. Conclusions

Multilingualism as the main idea of the European Union's language policy manifests itself in various ways, from inclusion in educational curricula and other documents to fostering this idea in different informal ways. The process of Croatian language acquisition as well as other languages is under a strong influence of English as the global language, but also of other languages surrounding Croatian, i.e. Slavic languages among which the mentioned research confirms the presence of Bosnian and Serbian. The situation in which there is lack of cartoons for kindergarten and preschool children

synchronized in Croatian is the reason why children watch cartoons in other languages and thus acquire some language forms or lexemes that they incorporate in their speech. They do that sometimes not even knowing the exact meaning of these words. Apart from the language of cartoons, another powerful influence are youtubers who children follow (e.g. Filip and Zaga – Bosnian YouTubers) and computer games that they play, as well as films about playing computer games which are often in Bosnian or Serbian. The influence of the Russian language which also 'came' the same way, i.e. through cartoons is particularly interesting. Children discovered it searching on YouTube with parents being present but not controlling their activities.

Since the sample is relatively small and purposefully selected, the results should be taken with some reservation, i.e. they can not be generalized. The influence is definitely present, and a more comprehensive examination would answer the question how significant it really is. It should be pointed out that two methods of examination were used, which led, as it was explained, to different results, i.e. to using lexemes differently depending on the occasion, situation and goal. Other extralinguistic factors, naturally, played a part in this research but they were not measured, e.g. if a child has a brother or a sister, parents' social status, sex, parents' reading habits, etc. Since the sample was purposefully chosen, the social situations of the families that participated in the research were similar and it can therefore be inferred that differences would not be of significance after comparing data. However, such analysis was not conducted because the sample was also very small. One should definitely consider conducting it in the future. In conclusion, we can say that parallel language codes developing in the process of early language acquisition is something not typical only of families and countries where bilingualism is natural but also that it happens spontaneously and does not influence acquisition of Croatian in a negative way. On the contrary it is beneficial for it and it directs the child from the early childhood in the direction of multilingualism and multiculturalism. One more observation is that this process will depend on the amount of time spent in front of a screen. Parents' control over their child's media consumption and on a child's interests and age. So, boys will watch war cartoons with battle tanks (in Russian), cartoons about animals and follow YouTubers talking about computer games and girls will choose female YouTubers talking about making yourself look beautiful and cartoons with less aggression and more colours. Also, in our research we did not find any differences according to gender. All of that will more or less affect the language in which these contents are presented and consequently this language will influence the process of the mother tongue (Croatian) acquisition.

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