

A functionally based approach to teaching Hungarian and Slovak in schools with Hungarian as a language of instruction in Slovakia

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According to functional approaches, language cannot be conceived of as an entity existing independently of the speaker, since the two most basic functions of language – the communicative and cognitive functions – work only in the case of active participants. All utterances carried out in a natural language transmit human knowledge and do so from a particular perspective, in some particular way and in some particular form. According to the views still generally propagated in schools in Slovakia, linguistic meaning and function are fixed. However, language is not only a set of elements and rules, since all meaning and function is constructed in a particular situation. So, language is a way of functioning (Tolcsvai 2005). This is why we can say that language is sound, organized noise which presupposes (phonic) substance, form (grammar and the lexicon) and situation. The latter is also related to non-linguistic factors (Halliday and MacIntosh 1966: 4, quoted by Kugler).

Because of this, and because “the mother tongue is primary for humans in gaining knowledge about the world, in their self-definition, and in shaping their relationship with the world known to them” (Tolcsvai 2005). It is self-evident that in a minority context it is especially harmful to talk about grammar without developing a dialogue between the students’ own experience regarding language and the scientific description. It is of primary importance to make students realize and become conscious of the fact that discourse always reflects the speaker’s point of view and intention to direct the interlocutor’s attention. The curriculum should progressively move towards more abstract categories, possibly even without using the scholarly terms for them. All of this is impossible to do, however, without making both students and teachers aware of their sociolinguistic relationship.

This presentation attempts to demonstrate how the dialogue outlined above can be developed, and how students and their teachers can be made aware of the sociolinguistic relationship between them in the course of teaching a specific grammatical category (namely, modality).

Kugler Nóra 2009: Funkcionális grammatikai gyakorlatok a 9–12. évfolyam számára [Exercises in functional grammar for 9th through 12th year students]. *Anyanyelv-pedagógia*. <http://www.anyanyelv-pedagogia.hu/cikkek.php?id=153>

Halliday, M. A. K. – MacIntosh, Angus 1966. *Patterns of language*. London: Longman.

Tolcsvai Nagy Gábor 2005. Funkcionális nyelvtan: elmélet és gyakorlat [Functional grammar: Theory and practice]. *Magyar Nyelvőr*. 348–362.