From exclusivity of the standard language to critical discursive flexibility in first-language teaching: the Slovenian case

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Abstract
Traditional schemes and value systems, among which there is also the use of the standard Slovenian language as soon as an individual is positioned in a public or formal situation, no longer reflect the social practice and values of modern society. Such a situation is also reflected in interferences from non-standard language varieties or even in non-acceptance of the standard language by some native speakers of Slovenian language, especially those from marginal social groups. One of the main tasks of first-language teaching is, therefore, the development of critical discursive flexibility, where the central role is still kept by the standard language, i.e. the language variety allowing an individual to equally participate in education, professional and public life, but it is no more put in the schematic, hierarchical relationship with non-standard language varieties. To make some starting points, in the article, firstly the theoretical models of language stratification in Slovenian linguistics are reviewed and some contradictions between prevailing theory, based on the Prague structural functionalism, and modern discursive practice are pointed out. Further on, from the perspective of critical discursive flexibility and fluency in the standard language, current curriculum for Slovenian as first/national language in High school is analysed and some didactic principles and suggestions for developing critical discursive flexibility as an element of cultural awareness and linguistic correctness in the standard language as an element of language awareness are presented.

Key words: first/national language teaching, discursive flexibility, standard language, interferences, cultural awareness, language awareness

Introduction
The so-called postmodern era is significantly marked by globalisation and multiculturalism, an increasing changeability of individual living spaces and lifestyles (Ule Nastran 2013: 89). Consequently, beyond collective, national identities, a more important place has been gained by personal identities, which are formed through social interaction among people, through mutual attributions, expectations, and everyday activities, in which individuals develop and experience their life story as a coherent and logical whole (ibid). In line with changes in social practices and values, the modern socio-linguistics points out that an individual's linguistic identity is not only related to the standard language in its national-representative role. It is complex and changing, because each of the social groups with which we identify, is defined also through its own language variety and discourse¹ (Bergoč, 2010: 36, Byram, 2007: 6, 7). This complexity is maybe even more typical of languages with numerous dialects

¹ Fairclough (1992: 43) defines discourse as a „whole of discursive practices within an institution or society and relationships between them“.

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and sociolects, like the Slovenian language,\(^2\) and with the asymmetric standardisation of written and spoken language. (cf. Bitenc, Kenda Jež 2015: 31)

In Slovenia, contradictions between hierarchically ordered schemes, among which there is also the use of the standard language as soon as an individual is positioned in a public or formal situation, and a student’s everyday experience is also reflected in the fact that many speakers in the speaking situations where they are expected to use the standard language use one of non-standard varieties. Use of other language varieties is most often due to a lack of discursive flexibility, but in some speakers it is also an expression of conscious rejection of the standard language, which is understood by many members of marginal or sub-cultural social groups as the language variety of the dominant social group and its culture (cf. Bitenc 2016). In addition, even when speakers of Slovenian as the first language speak the standard language interferences from non-standard varieties frequently occur in it. Although the reasons for general non-acceptance and/or incorrectness in the use of the standard language are much wider, such a situation also means that teaching the first/national language in Slovenian schools does not successfully enough develop a student’s critical discursive flexibility and his/her fluidity in the standard language that are both the important components of his/her critical communicative competence. The research questions, discussed in the article, are therefore: which contradictions between theory of language stratification and modern communicative practice can we define; how is the discursive diversity represented and treated in school; and finally, how can the current school practice be improved and upgraded. When trying to find those answers, in the paper, we first reviewed the models of language stratification. Further on, we analysed the current curriculum for Slovenian as first/national language in high schools (Curriculum 2008), and finally, some didactic principles for developing the critical discursive flexibility and fluency in the standard language are proposed.

1. **Models of language stratification in Slovenian linguistics**

The basis for the model of language stratification prevailing in the Slovenian linguistic theory and, consequently, also in school practice, is the Prague structural functionalism, from which J. Toporišič (2000) took over the division of language varieties along the two main axes. The first axis is formed by social varieties, divided into two groups: the standard language, which includes strict, i.e. mainly written, and colloquial, i.e. only spoken versions, and non-standard varieties, in which Toporišič classifies non-standard regional colloquial languages, dialects and urban languages. Researching and teaching were traditionally concerned mostly in the written standard (“literary”) language and in dialects (cf. Šmole 2004: 321–324; Bitenc, Kenda Jež, 2015: 32), while the social varieties were generally classified hierarchically according to larger or smaller geographic distribution. The central place is hereby given to the standard language because of its pan-nationality,\(^3\) its nationally representative and nationally cohesive functions through which individuals define themselves as a member of a nation. Consequently, in first-language teaching the identity function is at-

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\(^2\) Slovenian is a South Slavic language, spoken nowadays by a total of around 2.4 million speakers. It has seven dialect groups and more than forty local dialects and subdialects. (cf. Bitenc, Kenda Jež, 2013: 13; Škof et al. 2011: 11)

\(^3\) Šekli (2015: 95), for example, defines standard language as a social linguistic occurrence and as a concrete (i.e. system) inorganic (i.e. standardised) idiom of the highest hierarchical level.

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tributed only to the standard language and is considered on the abstract, collective level.

The second axis of the diasystem is constituted of functional varieties of language, which Toporišič classifies in practical-communication (i.e. every day), publicist (i.e. media or journalistic), professional and literary (i.e. artistic) languages. According to the theory of the Prague functionalism, the standard language is the only social language variety that is realised in all functional varieties, while the non-standard ones are appropriate only in a non-formal, private discourse and acceptable as stylistic element in literature or advertising. Therefore, the second characteristic of the standard language is a maximum functional segmentation associated with it. In the class, such an understanding results in non-critical schematic description of typical situations for use of each language variety and in insisting on a hierarchical relationship between the standard language and all other varieties.

An alternative model of language stratification was presented by Skubic (2005) who proceeded from the findings of M. A. K. Halliday and the theory of discourse. According to Halliday (1986), Skubic includes in a social axis discourses of social groups,\(^4\) which are characterised by specific use of language elements, communication principles, and a predictable thematic context. In determining sociolects, Skubic uses two criteria of classification. On the basis of a greater or lesser linguistic similarity with the standard language, he divides primary sociolects into cultivated and marginal. Cultivated sociolects are characteristic for speakers above a certain degree of political, economic or cultural capital, but also for people who moved in geographic terms or rose in social terms. They are closer to the standard language, and their speakers accept in the intimate primary discourse the rules and values of the dominant culture, which is expressed also through so cold cultivated discursive patterns (ibid). Marginal sociolects,\(^5\) however, are typically sociolects of social groups with less social power, namely languages of political, economic and/or cultural deprivileged speakers. They declaratively acknowledge a ‘superiority’ of the standard language, but in spite of that, they feel a loyalty to their sociolect, which they also require from other members of their group. Namely, they feel that their own language variety relates to a specific way of life (ibid) that is abandoned by speakers when they accept another sociolect. Consequently, for them it would be especially important that the school defend their self-confidence as speakers of a certain language variety, and it should not make them ashamed of their primary sociolect.

According to the second criterion Skubic divides sociolects into primary and secondary ones. The primary sociolect, according to Gee (1989), is the language variety that an individual has first learned and uses in direct communication with his/her friends and family. Therefore, the primary sociolect is also the language variety with the greatest identity power. While secondary sociolects are language varieties, which an individual has accepted during his/her socialization as a member of different non-formal (sub)cultural, professional or interest groups. Due to changeability of individual living spaces and lifestyle, their repertoire is variable and individual. Each of them is usually used in specific context and the speaker often consciously switches to a particular one.

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\(^4\) Halliday calls them dialects, but this concept is not used in the paper due to its geographical denotation in the Slovenian linguistic area in the meaning of a sociolect.

\(^5\) They can be roughly divided into rural, urban and immigrant sociolects.
Nevertheless, while Skubic, in perceiving the functionalism’s individual perspective “rehabilitated” sociolects as social language varieties with great identity power, he does not explicitly place the standard language on the social axis. According to Giles and Powesland’s (1975, p. 15) division of the standard languages to class-dependent and the context-dependent languages, the standard Slovenian language he classifies among the latter and explicitly places it only on the second axis of language stratification system that, instead of abstract functional language varieties, consists of registers, genres and discourses, through which the requirements of the current institutional situation is realised. It is, therefore, about the style of speech that is considered appropriate in certain formal- or public situations because of its informational function and neutrality.

As opposed to the traditional Prague functional theory, Skubic neglected the identity function of the standard language, because he does not identify the nation as a cultural social group with its own identity strength that is using the standard language to express it in the most prestigious or symbolic situations. In addition, on the functional axes, he associates the genres and discourses only with institutional communication, while Jay L. Lemke (1985) and Fairclough defines them much more broadly, as the “whole of discursive practices within an institution or society and relationships between them” (Fairclough, 1992: 43). The standard language as a chosen variety, therefore, has also a strong social function. From the first-language teaching perspective, it is therefore not only important to guide students to reflect the relationship between the individual identity and his/her whole repertoire of language varieties. It is equally important to encourage them to research the connections between their social roles and a certain language variety in different institutional or non-formal discourses.

1.1. Functions of the standard language in today’s Slovenian society

In spite of a changing relationship between social language varieties and their acceptability in different social contexts, the standard language is still the language variety that allows an individual to equally participate in education, professional and public life (cf. Larre, 2009: 27), which is particularly important in view of the members of marginal social groups. However, to defend its central role at schools, it is no longer enough to refer to its “traditional” functions, i.e. pan-nationality and the exclusive appropriateness in public and formal communication. It can only be defended if we persuade students in its representative, social and identity function in their own lives.

According to functional theory (cf. Jakobson, Halliday, Škiljan), language has at least three main functions: informational or representative, social or interpersonal, and identity or expressive.6 In the first one, the standard language acts as the most neutral, non-personal, objective precise language variety; that function seemed to be important especially in news media or science texts and in legal and official texts with performative role. The social function is often exposed in formal and informal interaction. In formal interaction, the use of the standard language usually expresses formality and non-personality of the relationship between interlocutors, but also unequal status in institutional hierarchy. In the informal interaction, due to its secundarity and because almost all Slovenian speakers have to learn it at school if they want to

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6 Those three functions are often exposed also in researching a pedagogical discourse. (cf. Kunst Gnamuš, 1992)
achieve fluidity and expertness, it is also an expression of the speaker’s higher education and his/her belonging to non-marginal and non-rural society. It is also used in its social function as a tool for increasing the distance and creating a priority status. And in the identity function, it acts as a representative, prestigious language form, representing a particular national community, based on common language. If in the informational-focused situation the standard language is the logical choice because of its inherent characteristics, then, if we quote M. Bitenc (2016), in identity- or social-focused situations it has to compete with other individuals’ sociolects.

As we can find out, an individual uses the Slovenian standard language to express his/her national, citizen or social identity and values, his/her attitude to others or to share important, widely relevant and scientific information with them. For some students, the standard language can be very close to their cultivated primary sociolect, but in spite of that, a big majority of them does not learn it sufficiently well only through out-of-school experience. One of the most important tasks of the school is, therefore, to, in the context of developing cultural linguistic awareness, train students to choose an expected language variety in the particular cultural and social contexts or to decline it, whereby their decisions are based on critical reflection. And moreover, to, in the context of developing language awareness, help them to understand existing rules of the standard language system (cf. Krapš Vodopivec, 2010: 245–246) and their function in achieving informational preciseness, to understand the relationship between synonymous linguistic elements and their connotative meanings, by which we influence the addressee or we are influenced by him/her.

2. Language varieties in the curriculum for the Slovenian as the first/national language for high schools

When analysing the current curriculum for Slovenian as first/national language at high schools (Curriculum 2008), we have asked the following questions:

1. Is the development of discursive flexibility included in the general aims of the Slovenian language subject and, if so, how it is included?
2. Do students, according to specified objectives and contents of general domains and areas of language use, mostly analyse a hierarchically arranged system of language varieties and describe typical circumstances for their proper use or do they also reflect the social and identity functions of different language varieties?
3. Are there any contexts, genres or text functions suggested as more appropriate for developing the students’ awareness of linguistic differences between the students’ primary and standard language?

2.1. Discursive variability and discursive flexibility in the general aims of the subject

There are three general aims of teaching the Slovenian language as the first/national language: 1. Awareness of the importance of the role of the Slovenian language in the students’ personal, social and professional life, i.e. language cultural awareness; 2. The development of skills in listening, reading, speaking and writing, i.e. communicative competence; and 3. Linguistic, meta-linguistic and stylistic competence in the Slovenian standard language, i.e. language awareness. Under the first aim, according the curriculum students learn about the status of Slovenian in the

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7 In addition to five general aims associated with literary teaching.
Republic of Slovenia and outside national borders. They realise that the Slovenian language is a fundamental element of their citizenship awareness; and speakers of Slovenian as the first language should be also aware that it is a natural socialisation reality for them, and a fundamental component of their personal and national identity. In that aim, language diversity is not explicitly exposed. In spite of that, it can be expected that the reflection of Slovenian language as an element of personal identity should also require a reflection on a student’s primary and different secondary varieties.

Under the second aim, students should thoughtfully and critically receive and produce listen and read texts, and evaluate them from the aspects of comprehensibility, effectiveness, appropriateness and correctness, but also put them into the temporal and cultural contexts. Although it is not explicitly expressed, this aim, from the perspective of discursive flexibility, because of the claim for the temporal and cultural contextualization and evaluating texts based on the criteria of appropriateness also presupposes observing different varieties of the language from the synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

A flexible choice of discourse is explicitly linked only to the third general aim, under which students should primarily learn about system rules of the standard Slovenian language; but in this context they should be also able to judge which language variety is appropriate in a given genre within typical circumstances. (Curriculum 2008, pp. 6–7)

Therefore, on the basis of general aims of Curriculum 2008 we can conclude that the rising awareness about language diversity and developing discursive flexibility should be important elements of teaching Slovenian as the first language at high schools, because they are explicitly or implicitly included in all general aims.

2.2. Discursive variability and discursive flexibility in the specified objectives and contents

In the central part of the curriculum, general aims are specified in the objectives and contents of seven domains. Only the first domain, Development of the language, national and citizenship awareness, is directly linked to developing linguistic cultural awareness and within this concept also to the awareness of the language’s social and identity functions. Within this domain, the first general aim is more or less literally repeated, without any further specification.

Within the four domains8 that are focused on developing the communicative competence, the main criteria for the classification of genres and discourses are the number of speakers (i.e. monologue or dialog texts) and the functional varieties which they belong to. Namely, on the one hand, students are dealing with official dialog texts, and on the other hand, they have to comprehend, evaluate and produce journalistic or professional and scientific monologue texts. Within these genres with precisely defined contexts, themes and contents, structure (external and internal) and language, students determine a social relationship between the speaker and the addressee, and their emotional state, and choose an appropriate objective or subjective words and forms... Nevertheless, no reflection about the eligibility for social requirements in

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8 2. Developing oral interaction, 3. developping written interaction, 4. developing the ability of comprehending and evaluating monological (spoken or written) texts, 5. developing production of monological texts.
today’s world or about the speaker’s prepositions, values, emotions, expressed not only through words and sentences, but also through the selection of specific language variety, is expected.

We can conclude that Curriculum 2008 from the teacher requires that, in class, he/she and students are focused on describing typical official and public genres. In spite of belonging to different functional discourses, all those genres, according to structural theory, predict the use of the standard language. Analysing them, the students evaluate a bigger or lesser degree of subjectivity, politeness, correctness etc. within established patterns, while they do not continuously critically reflect the social and identity function of chosen language variety or linguistic element.

The 6th and 7th domains are focused on developing the student’s linguistic, stylistic and metalinguistic competences. The starting point for acquisition of linguistic skills and increasing linguistic knowledge are journalistic or scientific texts, which students analyse and define within the domains form 2 to 5.

By observing and analysing their standard language, students can describe the linguistic system. By comparing their objectivity or subjectivity on the basis of schematic norms, to some extent they also develop the stylistic competence. Nevertheless, texts in the standard language do not demand any reflection on the selected language variety and consequences of its choice, nor comparison of linguistic differences between the student’s primary variety and the standard language.

2.3. Conclusions of the Analysis

The analysis of the curriculum shows that the school conception of language stratification is still based on a relatively rigid scheme that assigns the most appropriate language variety to a certain type of situation or a specific genre – where the standard language and situations, which traditionally should have requested it, are put at the forefront. (cf. Krapš Vodopivec, 2010) Cultural differences, which are expressed through the choice of different varieties and violating the norms, however, are often ignored, their importance is reduced, and they are judged only from the aspect of stereotypical criteria.

As a result, a student found in a concrete communication situation outside school maybe cannot reliably justify the use of the standard language in semantic, pragmatic and functional terms. He/she can only follow the cultural norms in a non-reflected way or reject them, where especially speakers of so-called marginal sociolects frequently choose a primary (or secondary non-standard) variety due to its greater identity power. At the same time, due to the attention in linguistic analyses focusing only on the standard language, students may be not sufficiently aware of differences between non-standard varieties and the standard language. This, however, contributes to linguistic interferences in the standard language, even when a student decides to use it.

3. Suggestions for developing critical discursive flexibility and improving the use of the standard language in L1-classes

The basic aim of developing critical discursive flexibility could be defined not only as recognition of contextually marked and unmarked (neutral) varieties or language elements by a student, but also as the ability to reflect the relationship between the chosen variety and (micro-)culture it belongs in and the expected variety and its culture.

In order to develop critical discursive flexibility, three didactic principles should be taken into account.
- From abstract collective identities to their personal contextual realisation

The choice of language variety is inseparably involved in the communication process. The issue of how cognitive and affective dimensions of communication and social knowledge influence the choice of a variety in a concrete situation, however, cannot be understood only on the basis of traditional norms and observing generating typical texts constructed in accordance with carefully prescribed parameters of a certain genre, as envisaged in Curriculum 2008. Its understanding requires consideration of contextual factors, especially of the status and the role (cf. Bergoč, 2010, Škiljan, 1999, Kramsch, 2003), which are directly related to the individual's actual or intentional identity. Namely, the linguistic characteristics of the speaker's utterance mostly depend on the expected social role in a certain context.

- From blindly following/rejecting norms to their understanding and evaluation

In order to successfully assume the roles and understand the statuses assigned to the role holder, participants have to share common norms for the use of symbols defining appropriate behaviour. One of the main tasks of language lessons, which are linked to the development of discursive flexibility, is to teach students to recognise the norms, ‘to determine the context of the rule and the requirements determined by this rule’ (Ule Nastran, 2005: 157–160). Communicative norms regarding the selection of a discourse are not clearly and explicitly formulated, they are implicit, and people mostly acquire and follow them spontaneously. (ibid.) Therefore, if we want to influence the student’s discursive flexibility, we have to allow him/her first to reflect on cultural norms that require the use of the standard language, but also the values, attitudes and views expressed by the speaker through refusing contextually expected standard language.

- From monolithic standard language to understanding its different functions

While the traditional theory of language stratification understands the standard language as an internally monolithic, modern linguistics draws attention to its different functions. It is this diversity where we can look for the answer on two fundamental questions, associated with developing the discursive flexibility in teaching Slovenian as the first language: how to reduce the interferences from non-standard varieties in the standard language, and how to prevent the rejection or unconscious non-acceptance of the use of the standard language in the situations that envisage it.

3.1. The use of standard Slovenian in its informational function as a starting point to prevent interferences from non-standard discourses

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9 The status of a person is determined by behaviour, actions and functioning of other people when they communicate with the person. The role of a person, however, relates to their own behaviour and actions in a particular communication situation, because it 'consists of a set of all behaviours that other persons can justifiably expect from the person.' (Skiljan, 1999, p. 34)

10 Within which discourses the speaker will select communicative patterns or within which varieties will he/she select linguistic elements, forms and words.
According to Larre (2009: 27), irregularities in the use of the standard language are often associated with the fact that the majority of students entering school is already fluent in one of the primary sociolects of the language, which is used in the learning. Consequently, the need to learn the standard language is less obvious than the need to learn a foreign language. As speakers of their primary sociolect, students easily communicate with teachers and later with other speakers in situations that require the use of the standard language, for example in written or spoken official, scientific and professional communication. In doing so, neither the speaker of a primary sociolect nor the listener is aware that the speaker uses the non-standard variety or its elements (ibid). In spite of a potential unawareness of the use of a non-standard variety or interferences from it, there are consciously or unconsciously present negative stereotypes associated with these varieties. Consequently, it is the failure in managing the standard language that puts speakers of less valued marginal sociolects in a disadvantaged position (e.g. in officiating).

According to V. Smole (2009: 559), one of the reasons for poor knowledge of the standard language relates to the fact that students are not informed of the differences between their primary and standard languages, which does not result in occurrence of discourse switching, but in unintended mixing of different language varieties instead. Elimination of interferences at the level of vocabulary, phonology/orthography, grammar and the structure of text often requires a comparative analysis of the primary and standard languages and the replacement of characteristics of the primary sociolect by respecting standard rules. This process is much easier if it is not „burdened“ with an affective dimension, but the correct use of the most formalised and de-individualised standard language is required by the content itself. According to Skubic (2005: 221), such texts are e.g. the texts with a performative power (legal and administrative texts) that fatally interfere in people's lives and, therefore, urgently need expressive precision, in cognitive texts (scientific texts) where single meaning and accuracy are necessary for a smooth flow of argumentation; and public texts in which the speaker takes the role of a public information or opinion distributor and, therefore, exposing itself through non-standard varieties would compromise the authority of the content (e.g. more complex didactic texts, ‘objective’ media information texts). Finally, as standard use of language as possible is also necessary in a number of electronic texts in order to facilitate the search within information (ibid).

In these situations, even cultivated primary sociolects are not acceptable, at least not in writing. Comparative analysis, therefore, makes students at the same time aware of the fact that the standard language is a specific language variety, which is envisaged as the language of more complex speaking situations for all members of the society. There are linguistic differences between them and all primary sociolects that require further learning by all. Assuming the „impersonal“ standard language does not

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11 Accordingly, A. Skubic (2005, pp. 301–302) e.g. notes in conjunction with marginal sociolects that rural sociolects are relatively favourably valued, because they are „connected to common sense simplicity and non-corruption. Compared to them, urban marginal sociolects are valued lower, because „they do not have their romantic rusticality“. Immigrants' marginal sociolects are valued the lowest, they are „a stigma, often ridiculed, and mark their speakers as foreigners in the community“. Similarly, speakers of cultivated sociolects could be attributed artificiality and sublimity due to their linguistic traditionalism, expressions of cultivated etiquette, and rejection of vulgarity
mean abandoning one’s own primary identity. It is an additional language variety that enables an individual to achieve new objectives in specific contexts.

3.2 The use of standard Slovenian in its identity and social function as a starting point for developing critical discursive flexibility

The use of the standard language because of its social or identity functions is rather more determined by the interpersonal and symbolic dimension of the language than the content. It is determined by communicative norms and by the individual’s personal attitude to them. If summarised from Susan Shimanoff (1980), the speaker’s behaviour can be classified into four sets. These are: blindly following or ignoring the norm, where the speaker does not recognise at all the norm they (do not) follow; unintentional respect or violation of the norm, where the speaker knows the norm otherwise, but does not use this behaviour in a concrete situation; intentional following the rules or violating the norm, where we consciously decide to respect or violate the norm without considering the arguments for doing so; positive and negative reflection, when we decide to behave according to critical reflection of a given norm.

People mostly acquire and follow communicative norms spontaneously if they live in an environment that respects these norms. (cf. Ule Nastran, 2005: 157–160.) In terms of using the standard language in social- or identity-focused context, it means that it will be probably more often accepted by students who are speakers of cultivated primary sociolects, and rarely by those who speak marginal ones. The possibility of rejection of the use of the standard language by the speakers of marginal sociolects is further strengthened by the fact that cultivated primary sociolects are also often heard at school due to their greater linguistic similarity to the standard language and greater social acceptance. They are used in informal communication or even in the classroom by teachers, but first of all, the latter pay less attention to linguistic or pragmatic mistakes of their speakers than to mistakes made by speakers of a marginal primary sociolect. (Cf. Larre, 2009: 27–31) Consequently, in many speakers of so-called marginal sociolects, the standard language is understood exclusively as class-dependent variety, which is spoken by educated people and members of the upper classes, and thus as a ‘rival’ to their primary sociolect. This may encourage them to declaratively insist on primary sociolect, also in the situations that envisage the use of the standard language, or they even reject learning it.

If we want to develop critical discursive flexibility in students, we have to encourage the selection or rejection of the standard language on the basis of critical positive or negative reflection. This is only possible if they face both, the socially- and identity-focused contexts where the use of the standard language is justified also in today’s society and the situations where the relationship between acceptable varieties has been changed. In both types of situations students should ask themselves the questions of who the speaker is and which social role he/she holds, what values and

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12 The decision to use the standard language even by those speakers does not necessarily mean that they really use it, because they may not distinguish between their primary cultivated sociolect and the standard language.

13 The reflection has to base on the principles of critical thinking: sensitivity to a broader cultural context, understanding possible derogations, awareness of the affective dimension of communication, multiperspectivity, judging on the basis of valid arguments, and a sense of ethical responsibility.
views he/she advocates, what assumptions he/she bases his/her speech on, and how all these relate to his/her selection of the (non-) standard language variety.

**Conclusion**

Critical discursive flexibility could be defined as a motivated and ethically responsible selection of language varieties, based on the critically accepted knowledge, behaviour, beliefs, and on reflected experience associated with the different functions of language. An individual is able to analyse and evaluate his/her own or someone else’s language activity, also according to the socio-cultural context and emotional power of language, and - where necessary - changes their linguistic behaviour.

In this context, the first/national language lessons are focused on the standard language, which is not only the holder of nationally representative function, but, for each individual, also the tool for achieving his/her social equality. Nevertheless, to develop the students’ critical discursive flexibility they should systematically meet with other social language varieties, used in information- as well as in socially- or identity-focused contexts. The observation of greater or lesser accuracy of the content or greater or lesser impersonality, achieved by use of different social language varieties, in information-focused situations enable students to understand the necessity of learning the standard language, to realise that the standard language is a secondary variety for speakers of all primary sociolects and to motivate them to eliminate interferences from non-standard varieties in their standard language.

On the other hand, when meeting speaker of different social varieties in different socially- or identity-focused contexts, students develop their sensitivity to differences and abilities for getting accustomed to other roles, cultures and perspectives. By doing so, they develop a positive attitude towards their own primary variety and micro-culture, but also towards the standard language and national culture as well as towards language diversity at general. Critically reflected differences enable them to understand that the choice of the standard language in socially- or identity-focused communication is substantially determined by the culturally defined role of an individual or by his/her refusing to expect a role in a concrete situation.

Deliberate, systematic and continuous critical reflection on the role of the standard language and other language varieties in both information-focused and socially- or identity-focused contexts can contribute significantly to changing the understanding of the standard language and its role in today’s world by the first-language speakers. In the standard language, they do not see a rival to their primary variety, but an additional code, through which they identify themselves as members of the nation or citizens of the state, when common identity is at the forefront. They see it as the tool to facilitate their communication with speakers of quite different Slovenian non-standard varieties and as a language variety that enables them to equally participate in official, professional, education and public life.

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