

## FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES OF THE 3RD AND 4TH GRADERS

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**Abstract.** *Starting with the 2016-2017 school year, all the primary school grades study according to the Framework plan approved by OMEN no. 3418/19.03.2013 and the school curricula approved by OMEN no. 3418/19.03.2013 (preprimary, 1st, and 2nd grades) and by OMEN no. 5—3/02.12.2014. The new curricula bring, through using the communicative-functional model, a pragmatic perspective on the study of language. Do the alternative textbooks facilitate the study of language, by applying the communicative-functional model? How does the primary school teacher apply the requests of the new curricula for the 3rd and 4th grades? These are the questions to which this article will try and find a suitable answer.*

**Keywords:** *school curricula, communicative-functional model, linguistic competence, pragmatic perspective, national evaluation.*

### **1. Introduction**

The autumn of the 2016-2017 school year marked, for all the 5 grades of the primary school, the final step of the transition to the new model of curricular projection, focused on competences, by the 4th grade curricula having become valid. Now, the pupils study the *Communication in Romanian language* and *Romanian language and literature* with new textbooks, approved between 2014-2016.

The school curricula for *Romanian language and literature* for the 3rd and 4th grades were designed on the *Framework for developing the native language communication competences*, developed between June-August 2014, starting from the conclusions of the studies in 35279 POSDRU project, *A Performant Learning System Based on Fundamental Decisions – Strategies of Using International Evaluations Regarding the Learning*

*Outcome (Presentation note in The school curricula for Romanian language and literature. 3rd and 4th grades. Annex no. 2 to OMEN no. 5003/02.12.2014, Bucharest, 2014, p.2).*

The *Framework for developing the native language communication competences* emphasizes the communicative-functional aspect of the native language and literature learning, as showed also in the *Romanian language and literature* curricula in 2004: „, integrated development of the capacities of oral receive, oral expression, as well as receive of the written message (reading) and written expression ”(*Presentation note in The school curricula for the 3rd grade. Romanian language and literature. Annex.no. 3 to OMEC no. 5198/01.11.2004, p. 2).*

In creating the new school curricula, there were used the *Key competences for Lifelong Learning – a European Reference Framework, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18th December 2006*, in Official Journal of the EU, 30th of December 2006; *Literary Framework for Teachers, LiFT – Reference framework for literature* designed with European support and implemented in 6 member countries, among which Romania (<http://www.literaryframework.eu>); *PIRLS Assessment Framework* (<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/framework.html>) – The international study regarding the progression of the reading competences by the end of the primary school, in which Romania is part since 2001 – with tests in both Romanian and Hungarian languages); *The European Language Portfolio* ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Portfolio\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Portfolio_EN.asp)).

The new curricula’s aim is an educational approach based on the pupils’ and society’s needs, providing learning contexts which offer the pupils quality acquisitions within oral and written communication field.

## 2. The study of language in the 3rd and 4th grades curricula and textbooks

We intend to achieve an analysis of the school curricula designed is 2004-2005, as well as in 2014, following the reference objectives and specific competences, examples of leaning activities, and learning contents which approach the language issues.

Table no. 1 - The Map of Learning Contents for the *Language Study Field*

Valid school curricula (since 2014)		Former school curricula (from 2004 and 2005)	
3rd grade	4th grade	3rd grade	4th grade
Vocabulary			
		The word (update) Words with different form and similar meaning (update). Words with opposed meaning (update)	
			Words with the same forma,

Valid school curricula (since 2014)		Former school curricula (from 2004 and 2005)	
3rd grade	4th grade	3rd grade	4th grade
			but different meaning.
Phonetics			
		Sound and letter. Vocals and consonants. Writing and pronunciation of the words starting with e (personal pronouns, verb to be). Writing and pronunciation of the words containing diphthongs. Writing and pronunciation of the words containing hiatus: ee, ii (without given terminology) and of words containing the letter x. The syllable. Splitting words into syllables (writing problems).	(update) Splitting words into syllables (update).
Morphology			
Inferring the morphological classification – noun, qualifier adjective, personal pronoun, verb  Inferring the number, and gender		The word - part of speech	
		The noun. Common nouns and proper nouns. Number.	The noun (update) Gender. Number. Syntactic position: subject (update); secondary sentence part.
		The adjective. The noun and the adjective number agreement. <i>*The position of the adjective to the noun, within the sentence.</i> <i>*The orthography of the adjectives ending in „-iu”</i>	The adjective (update). The noun and the adjective gender and number agreement. The position of the adjective to the noun, within the sentence. The orthography of the adjectives ending in „-iu”
		The pronoun. Personal pronoun. Person. Number. Polite personal pronoun – identifying it and using it in the communication.	The pronoun(update). Personal pronoun. Number. Person. Gender. Polite personal pronoun (update). Syntactic function: subject (update); <i>* secondary part of the sentence</i>

Valid school curricula (since 2014)		Former school curricula (from 2004 and 2005)	
3rd grade	4th grade	3rd grade	4th grade
		The numeral – identification. Orthographic and orthoepy problems: writing of simple and compound numerals – without given terminology)	The numeral (update). Orthographic and orthoepy problems: compound numerals, ordinal numeral.
	Inferring the person, and the tense.	The verb. Person. Number. Orthographic and orthoepy problems: verbs to be and to take	The verb (update). Person and number (update). Tense: present, past (all forms), future (literary form) Syntactic function: predicate. Orthographic and orthoepy problems: verbs to be and to take
Syntax			
	Inferring the simple relation between words: subject-predicate	The part of sentence. Syntactic function of subject. Subject expressed by noun and subject expressed by personal pronoun. Syntactic function of predicate. The subject and predicate agreement. Main parts of sentence.	The subject. Simple subject and Parts of speech expressing the subject (noun, personal pronoun). Verbal predicate. Subject and predicate agreement.
		Secondary parts of sentence.	The attribute – secondary part of sentence which determines a subject. Attribute expressed by: noun, adjective, <i>*adjectival numeral</i> The complement – secondary part of sentence which determines a verb. Complement expressed by noun. <i>*Complement expressed by pronoun.</i>
		The simple sentence. The compound sentence.	The syntax of the sentence. The sentence (update). The simple sentence and the

Valid school curricula (since 2014)		Former school curricula (from 2004 and 2005)	
3rd grade	4th grade	3rd grade	4th grade
			compound sentence. *The affirmative and negative sentences.

As one can see, the present school curricula emphasize on the intuitive learning of the language, and request avoiding the metalanguage. Is not the terminology that is the interest here, but the *language in function*.

In the school curricula for the 3rd and 4th grades, valid until the previous school year, the simple enumeration of classes and morphological categories led to a „need” for a frequently exhaustive approach, which didn’t take into account the specifics of Piaget development stages.

The conceivers of the present Romanian language and literature curricula for 3rd and 4th grades propose a new approach to the language issues – at a first glance, much more simple, but with an increased responsibility, which influences the formation and development of each pupil’s personality.

To study intuitively the grammatical notions means, firstly, to rethink the way of approaching the grammatical aspects of the studied (literary and non-literary) texts, to „exploit” the formative-educative potential of the speech acts, to valorize the learning experiences, with the purpose of developing metacognitive habits, necessary for these times when „the new generations live in another horizon and in another rhythm, both to be taken into account by the education” (Florentina Sâmișăian, *A Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature. Present Challenges for the Teacher and the Student*. Bucharest: Art Publishing House, 2014, p.22).

To paraphrase the linguist Michael Halliday, the students should learn the language, about the language, and through the language, from any linguistic situation which bear a meaning. And this is made possible by the teacher who offers varied learning situations/activities to the students, so they can valorize their own life and learning experiences. Kolb considers that experience is a foundation for creating knowledge, while “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38, apud Illeris, 2014, p. 154).

Kolb’s theory, created on the basis of experiential learning model, comes to support the intuitive study of grammatical notions. The learning cycle, from Kolb’s perspective (1984, p.21, apud Illeris, 2014, p. 156), seen as a circle, starts from the concrete experience, goes through observations and reflections, to get to creating abstract concepts and generalizations, then to testing concepts implications in new situations. To the first two stages may correspond the intuitive learning of grammatical notions in the primary

school, but we have to take into account that in Kolb's learning cycle there are historic elements combined (the return to personal experiences) and theoretical (the last two stages: conceptualization and testing the concepts implications in new situations). However, Bente Elkjaer sees the researcher as focusing only on individuals: „In my opinion, Kolb won such a prominent place in practice and research in education because he states something that seems correct intuitively, namely that is important to base the teaching on participants' own experiences. [...] Still the problem is there are lots of different experiences in a classroom, and the teacher is rarely capable to get everyone's attention by addressing their own subjective experiences.” (Illeris, 2014, p. 157).

But, in John Dewey's perspective, the experience may be both subjective and objective, it is future oriented, knowledge is part of the experience, hence one can learn from experiences (Bente Elkjaer, in Illeris, 2014, p. 151). As a consequence, shifting the interest towards pragmatic learning (see the studies of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger) contribute to a new approach to grammatical notions and language issues, one adapted to the times we live in.

The alternative textbooks, based on the curricula approved in 2014, must offer the teachers and students the necessary tools in order to understand this new way of studying the language, with respect for the link between the specific competences and learning contents.

In the 2014 curricula, the competences which target the variability of the language are:

-for the 3rd grade:

- 1.3. Observing some regularities of the language by heard messages;
- 2.4. Participation to interactions to find solutions to problems;
- 3.5. Observing some regularities of the language by read text;
- 4.1. Applying the rules of splitting words into syllables at the line end,

as well as

orthography and punctuation rules, when writing a text;

-for the 4th grade:

- 1.3. Observing the mistakes in heard messages, in order to correct them;
- 2.4. Starting and maintaining an interaction to solve individual or group problems;
- 3.5. Observing the mistakes in read texts, in order to correct them;
- 4.1. Acknowledging and correcting writing and punctuation mistakes, when writing a text.

Do the textbooks contribute to the formation and development of these competences? The analysis of the three alternative textbooks for the 3rd grade, from Editura Ars Libri, Grupul Editorial Art and Editura Intuitext, as well as of the three alternative textbooks for the 4th grade, from the same

publishing houses, shows a shy attempt to respect the demands of the school curricula in approaching the language notions. Through the selected contents and the proposed tasks, the authors targeted the formation and the development of the specific competences, for the two years of study, but they could not refrain from using the metalanguage. Therefore, the speech parts are studied explicitly, definitions are given, synoptic tables are drawn, the study of grammatical notions being done either deductively, or inductively:

- The noun. Types of nouns. Number of the noun. Gender of the noun. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 3rd grade, semester I, Ars Libri Publishing House, p. 43-44);

- The adjective. Adjective-noun agreement. Adjective position to the noun. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 3rd grade, semester I, Ars Libri Publishing House, p. 53-54);

- The subject. Subject expressed by a noun. Subject expressed by personal pronoun. Subject-predicate agreement. The simple sentence. Main parts of sentence. Compound sentence. Secondary parts of sentence. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 4th grade, semester II, Ars Libri Publishing House, p. 32-35);

- The common nouns and the proper nouns (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 3rd grade, semester I, Editura Art, p.68), but the gender and number of the nouns are inferred, by giving the pupils tasks to number the nouns, without mentioning „singular”, „plural”, „masculine”, „feminine”, „neuter” (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 3rd grade, semester I, Editura Art, p. 72), while for the 4th grade these grammatical categories are already used;

- The subject. Simple subject and multiple subject. Subject-predicate agreement. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 4th grade, semester II, Editura Art p. 54-55);

- The personal pronoun. Number of personal pronoun. Polite personal pronoun. Person of the personal pronoun. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 4th grade, semester I, Editura Intuitext, p. 66-69) – all forms of the personal pronoun, including the atone ones, are indicated;

- The verb. Number and person of the verb, Tenses of the verb. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 4th grade, semester II, Editura Intuitext, p.15-17);

- The predicate. The subject. Predicate-subject agreement. (*Romanian Language and Literature*, textbook for the 4th grade, semester II, Editura Intuitext, p. 49-50).

In my opinion, for a debuting teacher, such an approach to the elements which build the communication may lead to teaching acts that make receive more difficult, with pupils being asked to learn concepts and notions outside

the curricula. We must not forget that, for the majority of the primary school teachers, the alternative textbook is the main teaching resource.

### 3. Conclusions

The purpose of the Romanian language study in school is to form good users of Romanian language, who can use it both as a communication mean, and as a way of knowledge. The more languages one knows, the better that person can communicate with others, from different cultures and linguistic environments; one learns to be tolerant, flexible, spiritually enriched by his linguistic asset.

In primary school, the pupils learn that any speech act is a complex structure, whose components are conditioning and completing each other, they know the logic of language as a communication mean, get accustomed to using the Romanian language correctly and consciously.

The school textbooks, based on the valid curricula, have a very important role in developing the pupils' communication competences; therefore they have to offer the most adequate examples for the teachers and pupils, within the mentions of the curricula. This article was created from the need to draw the attention on the difficulties a teacher can encounter in trying to correlate the curricula with the resource – alternative textbook – and with the learning activities in class.

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