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Causal Constructions in Croatian Language Textbook Discourse¹

Causality is a semantic–pragmatic category (Kovačević 1988) which, in the Croatian language, does not have a dedicated grammatical category for its expression; nevertheless, there exist conventionalised and established linguistic resources for its realisation (Mihaljević 2016). The theoretical framework adopted in this study is systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1985, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 2014), an approach concerned with the study of language in use. Hyland (2010) points out that textbook discourse represents a hybrid of scientific and pedagogical discourse, while textbooks—for example, history textbooks—constitute a prime instance of language use for the transmission of knowledge and foundational scientific concepts (Coffin 2006). Within the systemic functional linguistic framework, causality is likewise regarded as a semantic category that is realised through the choices made available by the lexicogrammar, obtaining its final realisation either in spoken language (phonology) or in written language (graphology). Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to investigate which causal constructions are offered by the lexicogrammatical system of the Croatian language, as evidenced in textbook discourse. Previous research has predominantly focused on the language of foreign-language textbooks or Croatian language textbooks, whereas textbooks of other school subjects have only recently become objects of linguistic investigation, for example Mathematics (Širanović, Glasnović Gracin & Cvikić, 2025), Nature and Society and Natural Science (Turza-Bogdan, Čaleta & Cvikić, 2025), and History (Cvikić & Vujić, 2025; Trtanj & Pavičić Takač, 2025). It is precisely these three subjects—History, Nature and Society/Natural Science, and Mathematics—that constitute the corpus of the present study. The purpose of the study is to examine the distribution of causal constructions across three different domains of knowledge—humanities, natural sciences, and mathematics—in order to ascertain whether differences exist in their use of causal constructions and in the ways causality is construed. The research is conducted using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, which enables a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Through qualitative analysis, causal constructions are identified in selected textbook texts from the three subject areas, after which their frequency and distribution are established using quantitative methods. The overarching aim of the study is to contribute to a more comprehensive description of Croatian textbook discourse.

Keywords: textbook discourse, Croatian language, systemic functional linguistics, causal constructions

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