CREATIVE WORD-FORMATION IN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The article emphasizes the importance of studying derivation in infant speech, because it allows researchers to understand the extent to which linguistic processes are caused by the specifics of the human mind and the processes of cognition. Children's speech gives an interesting material for the study of the dynamic nature of the language because it is related to general cognitive activity of a child and the development of cognitive structures.

Derivation in children's speech is an indicator which helps to identify potential opportunities of the word-formation system, shows the functioning of language mechanisms, stimulates derivational processes and the processes of nomination in general. The article regards different stages of language acquisition in children and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the imitative theory. The authors describe and explain concrete examples of word creation in infant speech.

The results can be used in psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, clinical linguistics, in teaching Russian as a native and foreign language.

Key words: language acquisition, child's speech, word formation, derivation, word creation, lexicon, cognitive activity, child's development

1. INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century it became important in linguistics to study the nature of the language activity from different points of view. Nowadays it is obvious that there are several levels of investigation: psycholinguistic, neurolinguistic, cognitive and neural.

Children's speech gives an interesting material for the study of the dynamic nature of the language because it is related to general cognitive activity of a child and the development of cognitive structures [Wichmann 2014]. Identifying prospects for the development of the linguistic identity and the dynamic position of a child in language we can say that word formation (or, more exactly, word creation) is particularly important. On the one hand, it is a clear indication of the language mechanisms functioning, and therefore it gives a possibility to identify potential opportunities of the word-formation system, and in a certain way to predict the future state of the language; on the other hand, it stimulates word-formation processes and the processes of nomination in general. In addition, the study of children's speech allows us to understand how strongly linguistic processes are determined by the specificity of human thought and by the cognition of environmental knowledge, and therefore to determine the causes and conditions of language nomination, to identify the real mechanisms that contribute to the formation of speech skills and individual language system.

What are the ways of language acquisition? This question has been and still remains one of the most actual. Until recently it was believed that the basis of children's speech activity is the imitative principle. This principle is really one of the leading in social interaction. There is more than one copying mechanism in the human brain [Hamilton 2015], and it is proved that people are the most imitative creatures in the world. The theory of social-cognitive development (the 'Like-Me' developmental theory which is based on behavioral studies) is aligned with new findings in developmental neuroscience, including results using infant EEG, which is beginning to document the neural basis of 'Like-Me' perceptions prior to language [Meltzoff 2015]. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that from the linguistic point of view the supporters of imitative language acquisition theory minimized the degree of creative activity of a child; they drove his/her capacities of speaking and thinking to the elementary ability to operate speech patterns - ready statements that a child receives from the adult. The scientists distinguished the so-called “empty forms” perceived by a child mechanically, unconsciously, according to the principle of imitation [Piaget 1994].

Enormous intellectual and creative capacity of the child has been discovered relatively recently, in the second half of the 20th century, when psycholinguistics began the experimental verification of imitative language acquisition theory. Their researches have disproved many of the statements of this theory. It was discussed if the imitation is not the only basic mechanism of comprehension of the language in childhood; it was proved that the language acquisition process is not limited by the work of unconscious intelligence. A child performs a lot of work to dismember and generalize the speech flow units and then output a system of rules and grammatical structures [Arushanova 1999; Ushakova 1970]. Children understand the meaning of the words by induction from the contexts in which these words appear. This induction is constrained by limits of the
concepts. It is argued if the word learning involves the creation of new concepts or many aspects of vocabulary development are independent of conceptual development [Snedeker 2010].

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The materials for research were selected with the help of continuous sampling method. We used the database of children’s speech that is being created in Kazan Federal University within the clinical linguistics project [Gorobets 2015]. This database contains the speech examples of children without developmental disorders and the speech examples of children with speech disorders and SLI. In our research we used the methods of word-formation analysis elaborated in Kazan linguistic school by V.M. Markov, G.A. Nikolaev and other representatives of KLS.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A child is a creative linguistic personality, gradually pushing the limits of his/her understanding of the language; linguistic activity of a child is informative and creative, it is associated with the search for imaginative motivation to all language levels. A child himself/herself creates his own language, or rather even a few models of language, “generalizations” and “simplifications” which are then modified and excluded by him in the process of development [Zalevskaya 2000].

Modern psycholinguistics considers the child’s speech as a forming substance, a positive dynamics of which is made possible by the establishment of a child’s language ability. The means of language abilities formation are the signs of language (words, morphemes, sentences) that the child receives from the speech of people around him due to his/her linguistic intuition (or linguistic instinct), which also develops according to the formation of language skills and linguistic competence in general. The way of language abilities formation is through the comprehension of the basic laws of language system to assimilation of language rules, to installing of so-called filters imposed by the language standards and restrictions in his/her speech practice.

Active development of language ability occurs in the period of speech creation, which is understood as the realization of a child’s creative potential in the sphere of language determined by his/her desire to understand the system laws in the language [Zeitlin 2001]. In modern science words are often seen as the core representational units of language use, and the basic building blocks of language learning, as well as multiword phrases [Arnon 2017]. The results of neuromagnetic research demonstrate that acquisition and consolidation of novel morphology in human neocortex involve fronto-temporal perisylvian language circuitry [Lemen 2016].

According to A.G. Arushanova, creative abilities in children are different. There are so called “spontaneous semantics”, children who convey the same meaning of the word through a variety of means, each time solving the same problem in different ways; they are very sensitive to the meaning of words and connotations. The second group is presented by so-called “spontaneous formalists”, children who solve the tasks of the same type identically, ignoring the fact that they do not know the specific items. The third group includes “spontaneous conservatives” who remember which words they know, and which they do not know; they correctly say “a cat has a kitten”, but will not be able to call the baby of animal they do not know [Arushanova 1999].

Formation of linguistic consciousness of the child is in direct proportion to the development of his/her language skills, the development of a motivational level, which involves the identification and characterization of the motives and goals, driving the development of linguistic identity and defining a hierarchy of meanings and values in its linguistic model of the world [Karaulov 2002]. In this regard, the process of nomination in children’s speech is the mechanism of creative thinking, which allows the children to show their own understanding of the world through the analysis and synthesis of linguistic forms, in other words, it acts as an integral feature of the emerging language of consciousness. Getting to know the world around us, the child forms his/her own image of the world. The names of things are its reflections.

The names of things appear in speech by natural necessity. The wide range of children’s innovations is the best evidence of it. The randomness and freedom in word formation are underlined by a functional inner form of the word and its dynamism: today a child sets one match, tomorrow it will be another.

But there comes a time when the very name of the thing becomes the subject of a meaningful observation. It seems that children open their understanding of the language through the nomination process and the creation of words along with it. In the early stages of the word creation, when a child needs an individual word due to the lack of words in his/her lexicon, the child creates words only when it is really necessary [Habibullina 2015]. The ability to give new names consciously appears later, during the third or the fourth year of life (in case of developmental disorders and SLI absence), and some of these names are occasional [Smirnova 2014].

The result of the nomination process in children’s speech is presented by the units that reflect the universal desire of children to consider the word as a motivated sign and to look for traces of the word source. The principle of operation is the following: a word must contain a feature of a subject. Change of cognitive units leads to a change in the internal shape and / or to renaming of the object. Thus, the blanket on the couch is called ‘divanik’ (‘divar’ is a couch, and the blanket is expressed with the help of the suffix -nik), a saucepan where meat is cooked is called ‘myasovarka’ (according to the analogue words ‘skorovarka’, ‘multivarka’,...
The presence of antonomform system in the Russian word formation allows children to use in their speech the following innovations: "Adelinaprietaletalaklerke i zakhvatilmir. Vas' mir. Lunuzvezdy. Potom Zhenyatalerkuskhitil i raskhvatimirobratno" (Adelina arrived at the flying saucer and took over the world. The whole world. Moon and stars. Then Eugene stole the saucer and brought the world back). Here we can see the antonymic pair 'zakhvatit' – 'raskhvatit' (according to the existing model 'zapravit' – 'paspravit' (about the bed). It is interesting that a girl creates the verb 'raskhvatit' which is absent in Russian language but it seems to the child semantically incomplete because she adds the component "back" clarifying the meaning of her neologism. The prefix  is used instead of the prefix po- ("skhilt" instead of "pokhilt") shows the proximity of semantic layers in these aspectual prefixes. The most frequent in aspectual pairs, they can be easily replaced in children’s speech: 'sdvin’ya' instead of 'podvin’ya', 'sgnul' instead of 'pognul' etc. (according to the position of Kazan linguistic school we regard aspectual pairs as separate words and suppose that these acts are derivational, not form-building).

S.N. Tseitlin thinks that the emergence of specific, not registered in adult lexicon forms of speech, and especially the emergence of words, self-built by a child is just a proof that he masters the language well, that he designs forms and words, that his mind has already developed a system of specific rules that he uses it without help [Tseitlin 2001]. Language development, on the one hand, is an indicator of the level of development and the specificity of thinking, on the other hand, it is one of the links in the cognitive development of man. If a child at some point does not manifest himself/herself as a creating language personality, it should be an alarm sign for parents and teachers. The mechanism of analogy is the basis of design and interpretation of different language facts in a child. The most shining example of the implementation of this mechanism is usually seen in the names of baby animals. Following to the analogical principle ('kot – kot’yonok', 'sln – slonyonok') a child creates explainable names with clear inner forms for other animals: 'byk – bychonok', 'otsa – ovchonok', 'petukh – petushonok', even 'chelovek – chelovechonok' etc., according to the example 'medved' – 'medvezhonok' a child can name the baby of panda 'pandezhonok' etc. This tendency is very typical for children with SLI: it takes a long time to learn by heart the words with suppletive stems. A child without SLI usually knows all these words by heart even if he/she does not understand the etymology; children with SLI have great problems with understanding of this linguistic phenomenon.

4. SUMMARY

An infant penetrates into unknown words by comparing them with some other familiar words. To understand the meaning of any word, a child should comprehend its formal structure, determine the producing word, the choice of which is caused by the presence of a motivating image; he/she should “catch” a word-formation model and define the contribution of word formation to the semantics of the unit. This “etymological instinct” in children is determined by their desire to understand the internal conditionality of links between sounds and meanings. Trying to find the internal form of a word children intuitively follow the logic of language, using existing models of motivation in it, combining “the synthesis of words with its analysis” [Zeitlin 2001].

To get rid of "empty forms," the children try to find a rational explanation for the name of an object, phenomenon. Taking into account the content of the familiar words, a child tries to establish a rational connection, between the name and the usual meaning of corresponding lexical unit and between the name and the concrete use of the lexical unit.

5. CONCLUSION

The authors examine the existing points of view on the process of language acquisition and give a psycholinguistic description of word formation and word creation in children. The process of nomination in children's speech is regarded as the mechanism of creative thinking. New and occasional words created by children reflect basic laws of the language, the potential of language system and contribute to the study of linguistic aspects of language acquisition.

A child realizes his/her potential to create words with the help of design and interpretation of linguistic facts. The potential to create new linguistic forms and units is related to the infant’s cognitive activities and development of mental structures. The child constantly assumes (it is quite reasonable and based on the sign concept of language) that there should be symmetry of the formal and semantic structure of the word. Almost all “childish” innovations (with rare exceptions) are built on this symmetry. A “childish” word is a sensual sign based on linguistic laws [Mardieva 2014]. The majority of children’s interpretations are logical and consistent with their views and experience.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that the data presented do not contain conflict of interest.
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