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ON LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN CZECH-SPEAKING CHILDREN

The cognitive and the linguistic development do not proceed in unison, the former of them being the primary. This is generally acknowledged and supported by many lines of evidence coming from examining speech development both from the psychological and linguistic point of view. In the present article we draw attention to the priority of different features in the linguistic sphere.

Many of the data observed in Czech children in mastering their mother tongue bear evidence of the fact that

- A. the phonemic development outstrips the formal phonetic development;
- B. the semantic development outstrips formal grammatical development.

For illustration, let us quote here some examples in the behaviour of Czech-speaking children which might be considered as universal¹⁾.

A. The phonemic plane

1. the replacing of the voiced consonants by means of their voiceless counterparts, e.g. [títí] „děti“, [toma] „doma“, [po:zat] „bouchat“;

2. the replacing of the fricatives by means of the corresponding stops, e.g. [hap] „haf“, [boja:k] „voják“, [tela:tko] „selátko“;

3. the replacing of the affricates /c/ and /č/ by means of the stops /t/ and /t/ respectively at the first stages of speech development, by means of the sibilants /s/ and /š/ after mastering the fricative articulation, cf. [tepita] — [sepiška] „čepička“, [telej] — [selej] „celý“;

4. the replacing of the velar consonants by means of the alveolar ones, cf. e.g. [tolešto] „kolečko“, [seba] „chleba“;

5. the replacing of the phoneme /l/ by means of the palatal /j/, cf. [maja:] „malá“ [jenka] „Lenka“;

6. the replacing of the phoneme /r/ by means of the phoneme /j/ and by means of the phoneme /l/ at later stages of speech development. As for the syllabic [r], it is at first replaced by the vowels /e/ and /u/, later on by the syllabic [l], cf. [peši:, puši:, p|ši:] „prší“;

¹⁾ Naturally, many of the data have their parallels in other language-speaking children and may be, no doubt, richly exemplified. In the present article, however, we have confined our attention to the mastering of the Czech language only, leaving cross-linguistic comparison aside.

7. the replacing of the voiced and voiceless allophone of the phoneme /ř/ by means of the stops /d/ and /t/ respectively, or — at later stages of speech development — by means of the corresponding fricatives, i.e. /z/ and /š/, cf. e.g. [jidi: — jiži:] „Jiř“, [ši:da — ši:da] „křída“;

8. the replacing of the diphthongs by means of the long monophthong, cf. e.g. [a:to] „auto“, [ho:pi] „houpy“;

9. the fluctuation between the short and long vowels, the latter having at first the expressive rather than distinctive function, cf. e.g. [pa:pa, papa:, pa::pa:].

In terms of features the quoted examples illustrate:

1. the priority of the *voiceless* over voiced phonemes;
2. the priority of the *stop articulation* over the fricative articulation;
3. the ignorance of the feature of *semi-occlusivity* and the substitution of the affricates by means of the stops and by the fricatives at more mature stage of speech development, reveal the developmental order *stop articulation—fricative articulation—semi-occlusive articulation*;
4. the priority of the *alveolar* over velar phonemes;
5. the priority of the *simple fricative* over fricative-lateral articulation;
6. the ignorance of the feature of *vibrativity* which shows both in replacing /r/ by means of the fricatives /j/ or /l/ and in replacing the phoneme /ř/ by means of the stops /d/, /t/ or fricatives /z/, /š/;
7. the priority of the *simple vowel* over the vowel chain;
8. the priority of the *short* over the long vowel.

It follows from what has been said above that the functional load of some of the phonemes is higher in the child speech because of their distribution apart from in their proper places, also as substitutes for those phonemes whose phonetic realization has not as yet been mastered. Concomitantly, a number of homonyms arise in the child, because neither in production nor in acoustic impression is there any difference between such items as *pum/bum, hapat/hafat, telátko/selátko, těžký/český, koníček/Toníček, Jenka/Lenka, vlásky/vrásky, kulka/kúrka, čička/šiška, vařit/vážit, křičí/čičí, Míla/milá* etc. The child, nevertheless, readily comments on incorrect interpretation on the part of adults and demands the distinguishing of the two phonemes in question though he himself is content with the realization of one of them, indicating thus that the mastering of the correct phonetic realization is not simultaneous with the identifying of the distinctive features in the phonemes, the latter evidently preceding the former in appearance.

As for the semantic development, in mastering the formal grammatical means the following features seem to be universal in Czech-speaking children:

The fundamental stock of words in the small child at the very first stage of his speech development consists of the interjections (especially those of onomatopoeic origin) and the nursery words (represented mostly by the substantives). These have the highest frequency in the vocabulary of any Czech child for quite a long period²). Verbs appear as the next wordcategory, followed by adjectives. The remaining parts of speech appear later and have progressively lower frequencies: pronouns—prepositions—adverbs—numerals—conjunctions.

²) There are of course, great differences as far as the phonetic realization of these words is concerned.

As for the *forms*, the child uses mostly those which are fairly frequent in standard language, while those forms with low occurrence in the speech of the adult are very rare or are totally absent from the child's vocabulary.

In substantives, the child uses the *diminutive* and *non-diminutive forms*, the former being more frequent. The consciousness of the existing contrast substantivum—diminutivum causes the child to presuppose that every substantive has and is used in both diminutive and non-diminutive form. Hence there arise, especially in highly verbal children, many neologisms which either have no counterparts in standard language or are formed by the help of incorrect endings, which the child chooses analogously to the most productive ones, (e.g. the neutral ending *-átko* is used in naming all young animals, completely ignoring the gender or irregular forming in standard language, cf. the child's „*pejsátko*“, „*sloňátko*“, „*levátko*“ with the adult forms „*pejsěk*“, „*sluně*“, „*lviče*“. Such terms as „*kosta*“, „*liša*“, „*ponoha*“, „*oříš*“, „*sluno*“, „*zoub*“ are, on the other hand, to be explained as new forms of existing words. The origin of the first three is due to the erroneous interpretation of the terms „*kostka*“, „*liška*“, „*ponožka*“ as diminutives. As for the latter three, they are genuine diminutives, but the child's back formation is non-standard, cf. the child's „*oříšek* — *oříš*“, „*sluničko* — *sluno*“, „*zoubek* — *zoub*“ with the adult forms „*oříšek* — *ořech*“, „*sluničko* — *slunce*“, „*zoubek* — *zub*“. Not exceptional are the forms which represent a three- or more-grade comparison of diminutives resp. augmentatives, cf. e.g. „*kosta* — *kostka* — *kostečka* — *kostetečka* — *kostetečkulinka*“, „*ježák* — *ježek* — *ježeček* — *ježeček* — *ježulíneček*“. As the examples illustrate, the comparison is achieved by inserting various additional infixes besides the proper or improper diminutive or augmentative suffixes³⁾.

As for the number, the singular predominates at the first stages. The plural forms enter into the child's vocabulary at certain stage of speech development, usually before the acquisition of the pluralization rules. Hence the non-existing forms such as „*zajíčeky*“, „*pejsěky*“, which are due to the child's adding analogous endings while completely ignoring the changes obligatory to standard Czech, e.g. the elision of the vowel or the change of the stem consonant (the proper form of the above mentioned examples is „*zajíčci*“, „*pejsci*“).

The next assumption the child makes is that every noun has both singular and plural. Consequently, he does not distinguish between mass and count nouns, pluralizing on the one hand the mass nouns (e.g. „*cukr* — *cukry*“, „*koks* — *koksy*“) and inventing singular forms for pluralia tantum (e.g. „*játro* — *játra*“, „*teplák* — *tepláky*“).

As for the cases, nominative is the most stable and most frequent in the child speech. Accusative and genitive come as the next. Their endings are, as a rule, identical with those the child hears most often in his linguistic environment. Deviations appear in those forms which are either irregular or have slight frequencies. This is an explanation as to why the child seemingly ignores the difference in the endings between animate and inanimate, soft and hard substantives. The productive endings and suffixes, however, play an important role in the speech development. This shows in the fact that the child masters them early and uses them consistently,

³⁾ It is natural that such neologisms do not appear in all children and have, as a rule, an ephemeral life. The conventionality which is obligatory for all members of the linguistic community being ignored, the child is not corroborated, sometimes even not understood by others and therefore stops using such expressions and creates new, more approximate ones.

which is not the instance with prefixes and prepositions. He even ignores the fact that some cases are marked by zero in standard Czech and he systematically adds endings even to these, cf. e.g. the proper accusative form „*dům*“, „*domeček*“ with the child's „*dům-a*“, „*důmeček-a*“.

As for the inflectional and prepositional acquisition the following pattern appears to be common to the majority of Czech-speaking children: the first locatives are noun—noun combinations, e.g. „*stoleček — kuchyňka*“. At the next level the locative and accusative immerge while the preposition are still ignored (cf. „*stoleček kuchyňce*“, i.e. the locative representing position / „*stoleček kuchyňky*“, i.e. the locative representing direction.). The governing prepositions appear only at more mature stages of speech development and for a long time are not used consistently. At first they are established in the situation where they fulfil the function of distinguishing position and direction, i.e. where the case endings are identical (cf. e.g. the masculine form „*ve stolečku / do stolečku*“), while in the situation where the inflection is meaningful, both the prepositions are still ignored (cf. e.g. the feminine form „*kuchyňce / kuchyňky*“).

The child finds, as a rule, little difficulty in mastering the gender. Naturally, at the very first stage, the feminine endings predominate, but very soon the child learns to adopt the correct forms. Of the exceptions let us mention at least the adding of the productive feminine ending *-a*, there where there should be none (cf. e.g. „*sůl*“ — „*sůla*“, „*hůl*“ — „*hůla*“), or quite conversely, the dropping of the ending *-a* in cases of the masculine substantive (cf. e.g. „*tat*“ instead of the proper „*táta*“).

In the verb, the infinitive is the most widespread in the child's vocabulary at first. The concrete persons, however, enter soon into his fundamental word-stock. Of them, the third person (used by the child when speaking of himself) is the most frequent. The first person, both singular and plural, however, soon gets the upper hand. Deviations have been recorded in the flexion where the irregular and less common endings are replaced by the highly productive ones (cf. e.g. „*spám*“ instead of „*spím*“) and in the ignorance of the auxiliary (cf. e.g. the preterite „*spin-kali*“ instead of the proper „*spinkali jsme*“).

Contrary to standard Czech where the verbal form is either negative or positive, the child's verb seems to be neutral and only the negative or positive particle, used postpositively at first, determines the meaning as to negativity or positivity („*bumbat ne*“ — „*běhat ano*“). The neutral character of the child's verb holds good also as to objectivity and subjectivity, and misinterpretations in this respect — compared to standard language — are by no means exceptional (cf. e.g. „*já to shořím*“, „*utekneme to rychle*“).

One of the very important characteristics of the Czech verb is the verbal aspect. The child very soon comes to express the difference between the verbs of perfective and imperfective character. Unlike the adults, however, who use the prefixes, he resorts to suffixes which — in this connection — are alien to standard language (cf. e.g. the adult forms „*dělat / udělat*“ with the child's „*dělat / dělnout*“ or „*těct/vytěct*“ — „*těct/teknout*“). The suffix is preserved usually long after the child has also the prefixed forms in his vocabulary and evidently remains meaningful as the perfective marker while the prefix is redundant. Similarly as in substantives, so too in verbs the child presupposes an absolute symmetry, i.e. that every verb has both the perfective and imperfective form: he readily creates the perfective forms even with such verbs which have no corresponding counterparts in standard Czech. The redundancy of the prefix is shown in the fact that the child — in arriving at the imperfective form situations

where this aspect is required—does not drop the prefix, but inserts further infixes, cf. „*napsat* — *napsívat*“ with the adult forms „*napsat* — *psát*“.

In adjectives the gender corresponds to the standard Czech usage in most instances. The few exceptions concern the adding of the improper feminine endings to any-gender adjective, indicating perhaps that the persons in the child's environment are foremost women. As in substantives, so too in adjectives, the child's predilection for diminutive forms is shown, cf. „*malíneneký, velíkanandánský*“. As the examples illustrate, the child uses the diminutive (or augmentative) forms instead of the comparison in adjectives, cf. the child's „*malý — malinký — malíneneký*“ with the adult forms „*malý — menší — nejmenší*“. The standard manner, i.e. suffix—prefix combination is—in most children—a comparatively early acquisition. Exception concerns the irregular comparison (e.g. „*dobrý — lepší — nejlepší*“) where the child clings to the regular one (i.e. „*dobrý — dobřejší — nejdobřejší*“). As the verbs, so too the adjectives seem to be neutral as to the positivity and negativity in the child and the same pattern (i.e. a positive or a negative particle used in postposition) is applied, cf. „*hodný ano / hodný ne*“. In mastering the correct negative forms, expressed by means of the prefix *ne-*, many a neologism appears on the basis of the child's belief that every adjective has a positive and negative form and that every prefix *ne-* represents the negative particle, which may be either added or dropped, cf. e.g. „*zlý — nezlý*“, „*nemotorný — motorný*“ (the latter forms do not exist in standard language).

To summarize:

the substantives, verbs and adjectives are the most important word-categories which build up the fundamental stock of words—the basis of the grammatical development in Czech-speaking children⁴). In them these characteristics might be considered universal:

1. in any word-category, the child masters as the first those forms which have *high frequency* in the speech of adults;
2. the child, as a rule, resorts to *regular formations*, mostly by means of analogy to the forms with highly productive endings;
3. *irregularities* in any form or any word-category are ignored at the first stages of speech development;
4. *the end* of the word is relevant for the child as the bearer of the function;
5. the grammatical realizations in the form of *endings, suffixes* and *postpositions* are more stable and appear earlier as compared to the realization in the form of *prefixes* or *prepositions*;
6. the child prefers not to mark a semantic category by *zero*, as his systematic adding of his own endings and suffixes clearly illustrates;
7. the child's disposition for *symmetry* in the language system accounts for the formation of e.g. non-existing singulars or plurals, diminutive and non-diminutive forms in substantives and adjectives, positive and negative forms in substantives, adjectives and verbs, perfective or imperfective forms in verbs—to mention at least the most typical examples.

⁴) Due to the special status of interjections we do not mention this category here, in spite of its importance and frequency at the first stages of speech development in general.

K OTÁZCE MLUVNÍHO VÝVOJE U ČESKÉHO DÍTĚTE

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1. dítě řeči dříve rozumí, než ji začne samo aktivně používat;
2. dítě ovládá distinktivní rysy u jednotlivých fonémů dříve, než je schopno jejich správné fonetické realizace;

3. sémantický vývoj zjevně předchází osvojení formálních gramatických prostředků.

Pokud se týče priority jednotlivých fonetických a gramatických jevů, konstatuje autorka, že:

a) ve fonologickém vývoji jsou primární souhlásky neznělé před znělými, závěrové před úžinovými, úžinové před polozávěrovými, prosté úžinové před úžinovými se zvláštním způsobem artikulace (laterály a vibranty), přední před zadními; u samohlásek pak jsou primární samohlásky krátké před dlouhými, samohlásky jednoduché před samohláskovým spojením, ať už dvojhlasného nebo hiatického typu.

b) v gramatice je pak charakteristický tento vývoj: jako první si osvojuje dítě ty slovní kategorie a tvary, které mají nejvyšší frekvenci a jsou tvořeny pravidelně. Nepravidelným tvarům se vyhýbá. Nositelem funkce je pro dítě konec slova. Sufixy a koncovky, zejména pravidelné a produktivní, zvládá dítě velmi brzy, zatímco koncovky nulové ignoruje. Smysl pro symetrii vysvětluje v dětské řeči existenci protikladných dublet, které ve většině případů nemají v řeči dospělých své ekvivalenty.