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How Do Young Children Verbalise What They See and Know about the World?

Jak małe dzieci werbalizują to co widzą i wiedzą o świecie?

Abstract: This is a review article. It characterizes the early stage of language development based on chosen literature. The author describes how children start to use verbal symbols and how speech becomes a tool in the process of thought. The article consists of two parts. The first shows the connection between language, speech, thought and creating terms. The second describes the development of understanding language symbols process and giving meaning by children up to about 16 months old.

Keywords: young child language; speech; thought; giving meanings by young children

Abstrakt: Artykuł ma charakter przeglądowy. Na podstawie analizy wybranych pozycji literatury podjęto próbę charakterystyki wczesnego etapu rozwoju językowego. Autorka opisała, w jaki sposób dzieci zaczynają posługiwać się symbolami werbalnymi oraz jak mowa staje się narzędziem w procesie myślenia. Artykuł składa się z dwóch części. W pierwszej pokazano relacje między językiem, mową, myśleniem i tworzeniem pojęć, a w drugiej opisano rozwój procesu rozumienia symbolu językowego i nadawania znaczeń przez dzieci do około 16. miesiąca życia.

Słowa kluczowe: język małego dziecka; mowa; myślenie; nadawanie znaczeń przez małe dzieci

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to present how children explain what they see and know about the world around them, it is necessary to make a selection from numerous conceptual and theoretical approaches to this extremely interesting issue. The necessity of choice means that some important issues will not be presented in this paper.

However, I will omit them deliberately and consciously, realising that the concepts evoked are not the only valid explanations of the issues discussed. The questions addressed will be presented in a synthetic manner. The attempt at synthesis, in turn, entails the inevitability of certain simplifications and omissions. I will begin my reflections by presenting the relationship between language, speech and thought, and the concept as a mental category for classifying objects. I will further present how children come to understand meanings that reflect concepts expressed in language. I will focus my considerations exclusively on the early developmental stage, i.e. the sensorimotor stage and the initial phase of the preoperational stage, when they begin to use verbal symbols, and speech (I am simplifying somewhat here) becomes “an instrument of thought” (Wood, 2004, p. 27).

LANGUAGE – SPEECH – THINKING – CONCEPT

Milewski notes that “in human life, significant phenomena play a major role, not by what they are, but by drawing our attention to something quite different, which is beyond them often in a completely different realm of reality” (Milewski, 2004, p. 8). These phenomena are called “signs”. The essence of a sign is reflected in two of its elements: the form of the sign, i.e. what can be observed with the senses (Latin: *signans*), and the content of the sign, or its meaning (Latin: *signatum*). Signs are divided into two categories: symptoms (or natural signs) and signals. Symptoms are phenomena that are not intentionally given by anyone, they indicate something according to the laws of nature, logic or physics. In order to read this information correctly, general life knowledge acquired through everyday experience is necessary. In the specific cases, the interpretation of natural signs requires specialist knowledge (Łuczyński, 2015, p. 26). In contrast, the latter group, i.e. signals, is deliberately directed by the sender to the receiver in order to influence him or her. The receiver is aware that the sender wants to convey some information to them, so they can receive the signal and interpret it in a manner appropriate to themselves. Signals therefore, play a major role in the act of communication. There are two types of signals, i.e. asemantic appeals and semantic signals. Semantic signals refer the receiver to some specific part of reality. They are often referred to as symbols. Semantic signals (symbols) denote a phenomenon that is imagined in a similar way by all members of society. They also are divided into two types: motivated (iconic) signals, i.e. images, and unmotivated, i.e. arbitrary signals. Arbitrary signals include one-class signals (closed), the number of which is strictly limited, and two-class signals (open). Here again, two-class signals can be divided into two types: simple, e.g. words, corresponding to certain classes of phenomena of the surrounding world; and complex, e.g. utterances correspond-

ing to certain specific and unique phenomena of the world. Meaning of words is related to the convention adopted in a given community, which is contained in the linguistic competence of language users (Łuczyński, 2015, p. 27). A word is the prototype of a linguistic sign. Words make up statements which are macrosigns, i.e. they are made up of signs which the words are (Baylon, Mignot, 2008, p. 25). Milewski points out that “this latter class is indeed an open and productive class; for by combining simple signs an almost practically unlimited number of complex signs can be created, which are the essential means of linguistic communication” (Milewski, 2004, p. 14). Thus, coming to the concept of language, it should be noted that in linguistics it is assumed that language is a set of conventional signs. Linguistic signs are symbols of things, persons, animals, plants, phenomena, features, actions, states, relations, abstract entities, etc., which function in a given language. The smallest linguistic sign is a vowel, i.e. a sound produced by human speech organs. In order for the sounds, which are diacritical insignificant elements of language, to have a meaning, they are arranged in specific conventions of voicing. Thus, combinations of the three diacritics: *r*, *k*, *a* in Polish form sequences of various arrangement and meaning, e.g. *rak* (crayfish), *kra* (floe), *kara* (punishment), *arka* (ark). Replacing one of these elements with another changes the sign (Grzegorzczkova, 2007, p. 25). A series of four diacritical marks arranged in the following order: *p-i-e-s* for Polish speakers has a specific meaning, i.e. *a domestic animal, bred for pleasure or trained for various purposes; a carnivorous animal of slender build, elongated muzzle, well-developed sense of smell and strong teeth, e.g. wolf, jackal, domestic dog* (Drabik et al., 2011, p. 642). It should be added that the arrangement of sounds forming the word *pies* is a sign only in Polish. For speakers of other languages it will not have this meaning. Since every language, von Humboldt stresses, “irrespective of the similarity of causal agents, technical means and the purpose behind all languages, possesses a definite individuality, which, however, can only be fully comprehended in the totality of its action” (von Humboldt, 2013, p. 298). And so the word dog mentioned above, in order to mean something to members of other communities, must take the following forms: in Spanish: *perro*, in German: *das Hund*, in Russian: *sobaka*, in Estonian: *koer*, in French: *cien*, in Bohemian: *pes*, in English: *a dog*. It should be added at this point that for Polish speakers, *pies* does not mean a specific animal. The word-name fits many objects in reality, provided that they have certain characteristics corresponding to the description of a dog. The essence of the meaning of a word is therefore not an individual association with an object existing in reality, but a reference to an abstract concept. A word as a sequence of sound units refers language users to a specific concept, i.e. a generalised knowledge of an object. A concept, on the other hand, is formed from the properties of concrete objects. At the same time, the use of words does not require an individual to interact with concrete objects.

Mere knowledge of a concept is sufficient to understand what a given sequence of sounds means (Łuczyński, 2015, p. 28). In addition, there are some abstract concepts that do not involve concrete objects in reality, but “refer to classes of phenomena that are identifiable on the basis of features distinguished by the users of a given language” (Łuczyński, 2015, p. 29). The concept of *longing*, for example, includes similar mental states of people, characterised by features such as sadness caused by the absence of someone or something combined with a desire to regain said someone or something (Łuczyński, 2015, p. 29).

This feature of language, as Grzegorzczkowska points out, is a manifestation of its enormous economy, as it makes it possible to remember, distinguish and recall from memory tens of thousands of meaningful units (words contained in the passive dictionary of an educated person), which would not be possible if each of them had a separate sound form. Furthermore, the human speech organ would not be capable of producing such a number of separate signs, and the perceptual organ would not be capable of distinguishing and identifying them. Thanks to this property, man is able to master reality by means of language. Moreover, one is also capable of communicating one’s intention to other people. Also, one can carry out various complex mental operations (Grzegorzczkowska, 2007, pp. 25–26), involving words that form the so-called mental dictionary in the human mind, i.e. the intuitive knowledge of words. This knowledge concerns the meaning of words (semantic aspect), the role a word can take in a sentence (syntactic aspect), the phonetic form of a word (phonological aspect), the relation of a given word to other words, and the orthographical aspect, i.e. the spelling of a word. This knowledge is needed by a person when speaking to someone.

At this point in the present discussion, it is necessary to distinguish another concept, namely speech (*langage*). According to de Saussure, it is a certain phenomenon; it is a capacity conferred on man in contrast to language (*langue*), which is the set of forms that this phenomenon assumes (de Saussure, 2004, p. 13). *Langage* involves what is common to all human beings in the way they use words and word combinations. During the act of speaking, humans very rarely use single words. Milewski points out that among the signs we use in speech, we can distinguish symptoms, appeals, images, and arbitrary one-and two-class signals (Milewski, 2004, p. 16). For an utterance does not consist of individual signs, but is a deliberate combination thereof, “language combines elements” (Baylon, Mignot, 2008, p. 25). All linguistic signs “interact to form an immensely complex ensemble, with the role of individual signs being different at almost every moment” (Milewski, 2004, p. 16). Speaking therefore, requires “intellectual processing” and language “imposes a specific organisation on thought” (Baylon, Mignot, 2008, p. 45). At the same time, language (speaking – K.K.) is not just a simple designation of thought, “but is itself the creative organ of thought” (Humboldt, 2013, p. 402).

Von Humboldt, discussing the relationship between speech and thinking, points out that thinking is “an intellectual activity, thoroughly mental, thoroughly internal somewhat passing without trace, through tone it externalizes itself in speech and becomes perceptible to the senses” (von Humboldt, 2013, p. 401). He adds that intellectual action is bound by the necessity of combining with sound, since otherwise thought cannot gain clarity and the image cannot be transformed into a concept (von Humboldt, 2013, p. 402). Of course, we cannot say that every thought requires using a language, as research is available concerning pictorial, pre-verbal thinking (Kurcz, 2011, p. 104). It is nowadays emphasised that while language is a tool for expressing a thought, it is not a copier-type tool, because “language is not a substitute for thinking, the richness of language does not translate into the richness of thought, and vice versa” (Kurcz, 2011, p. 105). In the light of the current state of the art, however, it can be argued that language is a collection of knowledge stored in memory, and the mental tools that allow it to be used (Baylon, Mignot, 2008, p. 45). This knowledge stored in mental structures is assigned different meanings by people. This is also why they use language in a spoken form, to convey to others the meanings that exist in their minds. Objectively speaking, each word (concept) can have several/multiple meanings (intentionality), and the scope (extension) of each concept can also vary. For example, the term *koziół* (a billy goat) in Polish has the following meanings: firstly, a male goat, secondly, a coach box in a horse vehicle, thirdly, a gymnastic device for jumping exercises, i.e. a vaulting horse, thirdly, “dribbling the ball; also the height of the rebound” and fourthly, figuratively, someone who is stubborn (Drabik et al., 2011, p. 362). “However, it is enough to say that the object (to which the concept refers – K.K.) belongs to a certain class (e.g. it refers to a stubborn person – K.K.), and then an individual knows that it has (or should have) all the properties that characterise the class in question” (Maruszewski, 2011, p. 322). Then, we know that when we say *koziół* (a billy goat) we are referring to the characteristics of a stubborn person. The boundaries of individual concepts are fuzzy and blurred. Therefore, it is possible to attach other objects to the category, which do not in all respects agree with the elements already belonging to it (Borowiec, 2014, p. 16). At this point of consideration, it is necessary to recall the concept of Rosch, who proposed two basic principles for categorising concepts. The first one is based on the principle of cognitive economy and explains the fact that man tries to obtain as much information as possible about the environment in which they operate while saving resources. The above-mentioned author points out that: to categorise a stimulus means to consider it, with regard to the objectives of categorisation, not only as an equivalent to other stimuli of the same category, but also as different from stimuli that do not fall into that category” (Rosch, 2005, p. 16). The second principle relates to the structure of the perceived world, and states that objects in the world

are viewed in such a way that they have a correlative structure. If humans perceive their elements, e.g. feather, fur or wings, it is an empirically proven fact that wings occur with feathers more often than with fur. In other words, the combinations of what we perceive in the world as attributes of real objects do not appear to us as undifferentiated. In her view, the category systems that man creates in their mind have two dimensions: a vertical and a horizontal one. Whereby the vertical dimension is related to the degree of inclusiveness of the categories. In this dimension, we distinguish such concepts as: dachshund-dog-mammal-living. And the horizontal dimension involves the division of categories from the same degree of inclusiveness, for example, a dog, a cat, a car, a chair. In the vertical dimension, the basic category is the most broad (abstract) dimension. On the other hand, in the horizontal dimension, distinctiveness and flexibility belong to the basic categories. Hence, it is possible to distinguish the most and least representative specimens in each category. Rosch points out that when forming concepts, people refer to:

- function, which is the result of their motor experience of interacting with objects. She points out that “for concrete objects, interactions take the form of motor activities” (Rosch, 2005, p. 21),
- images (including iconic representation) concerning the appearance of objects, including the identification of the average shape of a given object,
- and most often form concepts at a basic level, even when they know the superordinate and subordinate names of objects.

She draws attention to the importance of context in the formation of conceptual categories, pointing out that “context will influence both the level of abstraction at which an object is recognised and which specimens of a category are named, acquired, exchanged or expected” (Rosch, 2005, p. 33). The use of common conceptual categories expressed in a specific verbal form is essential in the process of social interaction. Otherwise, we would not be able to communicate. When communicating with others, people try to reflect their thoughts in speech so that the recipient reads them correctly, e.g. to assign the object we are talking about to the right category. Context, therefore, plays an important role, suggesting to the recipient a particular interpretation of the word (concept) in question, leading to the reduction of potential information to the information needed to achieve communication. I am thinking specifically of linguistic, interpersonal, instrumental and cultural contexts. The first is understood as a cognitive frame of reference that allows the creation of a “cognitive framework” for an utterance (Nęcki, 2000, p. 93). The cultural context, in turn, determines the sharing of a set of beliefs about reality between a sender and a receiver (Nęcki, 2000, pp. 96–97). Taking into account the specific context, we will certainly not say that *Janek jest kozłem* (“Janek is a goat”), but rather we will refer to a phrase functioning in the social consciousness: *Janek jest uparty jak kozioł* (“Janek is stubborn as a goat”) assuming that the recipient

will correctly understand our intention by referring to this meaning of the term. At this point we can add, following von Humboldt (with a certain simplification), that “human beings understand themselves only if they manage to test the intelligibility of their words with others” (von Humboldt, 2013, p. 405). And Szuman added: “language serves man as an irreplaceable means of understanding not only other people’s thoughts but also their own. Thanks to an appropriate linguistic expression, man arrives at a precise and clear thought, and thanks to it they can control it and shape it ever more clearly” (Szuman, 1968, p. 21).

ASSIGNING MEANINGS BY CHILDREN

The referential theory of meaning assumes that the meaning of a particular concept is the real object to which the concept refers. Concepts therefore, denote specific objects or persons. This theory does not account for the fact that not all words have meanings understood as denotations, e.g. *and*, *no*, *or* have specific meanings. Hence, the statement “Zosia ate the ice cream” means something completely different than “Zosia did not eat the ice cream”. A change of meaning is made possible by the use of a word that does not have its reference-designator in reality. In practice, we often refer to hypothetically existing, abstract objects that have no equivalents. It is therefore not difficult to see the shortcomings of this theory. However, it is useful as a starting point for considering how children assign meanings to objects in their environment and how they verbalise these meanings. According to Tomasello, there are three theories to explain how a child masters new words.

1. The associative theory or the theory of various methods of learning. It maintains that learning words occurs through association.
2. The constraint theory assumes that children learn words when they can narrow down the infinite set of possibilities that each word can have to a certain limited set.
3. The socio-pragmatic theory argues that children learn new words only when relating to other people (Tomasello, 2007, pp. 212–224).

According to Tomasello, when learning a new word, children use their socio-pragmatic and socio-cognitive abilities to determine communicative intention of others. It is hard not to agree with the author that “in order to acquire a word – that is, to learn not only to understand it, but also to use it correctly – the child must engage in a unique form of social learning” (Tomasello, 2007, p. 216). This involvement, as the author points out, correlates with the ability to share attention with the caregiver and begins from the first weeks of life.

Indeed, the first category of signs to appear in the child’s development consists of symptoms. Screams that accompany the child from the first moments of life

soon become differentiated and the vocalisations take on different forms depending on the needs that the child signals and the reactions to these signals from the environment. In the earliest period of life, the child is not aware that his or her screams affect the environment. Thus, he or she has no idea of their signalling function. The environment does, however, react to symptoms of discomfort expressed in the form of screaming (crying). A symptom is a sign directed towards the recipient. The caregiver quickly learns to recognise and distinguish tones of the child's screaming (crying) and the child learns to differentiate his or her reactions. In a short period of time, he or she cries in a different way when tired, in a different way when hungry and in yet another way when frightened. In response, the caregiver begins to differentiate their reactions to crying. In this way, the symptoms given by the child form a code in the mind of the caregiver. The way the caregiver responds creates a link in the child's mind between the signalling behaviour and the caregiver's response. The child learns to make vocalisations that will call out to the caregiver, in turn the caregiver will engage in activity to meet the child's need. This is an important stage in the child's development – the transition from symptoms to appeals. The child using appeals as a pre-verbal form of communication (a two-way code) begins to realise that he or she can summon the caregiver. A manifestation of this achievement can be observed in the following situation: when the child falls down, he or she first looks around to see if the caregiver is nearby and only when he or she spots them does he or she start crying to draw the caregiver's attention. In this way, in the second half of the first year of life, children learn to express their intentions in many non-linguistic ways. Above all, body movements and gestures begin to function as proto-declaratives (proto-statements) and proto-imperatives (requests/demands) (Gleason, Ratner, 2005, p. 387). The child begins to vary gestures and movements to express to others the meanings assigned to objects in his or her environment. If he or she fails to convey the meaning, he or she begins to cry. In this way, the child interacts with his or her environment which learns to respond increasingly to the child's messages (Ross, 2011, p. 52). The next stage is the achievement called phonetic coherent signals (Ninio, Snow, 2007, p. 129) which combine pre-verbal and verbal features. At the turn of the first and second year of life, children begin to grasp the semantic function of speech. At this time they perceive that certain parts of speech correspond to certain objects in their environment. According to Clark, the acquisition of concepts precedes the acquisition of words. Already in the first months of life, children show the ability to recognise two or more parallel objects, i.e. group them into categories on the basis of a certain similarity. Quinn discovered that three months old infants consider various elements to be "the same". They are, therefore, able to categorise these elements. In his experiment, children considered all pictures of horses to be the same, while the second category included all pictures of cats

(Schaffer, 2005, pp. 269–270). Fivush's experiment indicates that 18 months old children are able to categorise objects into those for washing and those for eating. The conceptual system thus provides the basis for the child to build the structure of the language being acquired (Borowiec, 2014, p. 43). In turn, in order to produce a word, children have to take a further developmental step, which involves linking the form in the utterances of different people, finding it in their memory and recalling the meaning assigned to it by those around them. At the same time, "the asymmetry between understanding and producing utterances is important for the language acquisition process to take place. It allows children to learn at their own pace. They are thus not dependent on adults providing them with examples of the right forms at the right time" (Clark, 2007, p. 167). Although, as Tomasello points out, models provided by the environment play an important role. The first words refer to those objects in the environment with which the child can interact directly. These objects have important functions for the child and therefore, are easily remembered. Analysing the first fifty words in the child's vocabulary, Nelson has categorised them into six groups: words referring to concrete objects, general concepts, terms of movement, individual words, socially useful words and function words (Walker, 2010–2011, p. 446). According to this author, most of the child's first words relate to his or her actions on objects. "For several months, before they begin to speak themselves, children observe objects and the actions associated with them, the interrelationships between objects, and various other units that co-create their everyday experience. They play with, manipulate and match objects around them. They fill and empty boxes with objects; they stack and tower objects and then scatter them; they squeeze and throw them. They watch and participate in various activities (...). Above all, they observe the events around them: all kinds of activities involving different people and the relationships between them" (Clark, 2007, p. 141). These observations confirm the research of Rosch, who adds that children categorise concrete objects before they have the ability to abstract (Rosch, 2005, p. 21). Young children memorise objects and words relating to their "here and now" (Gleason, Ratner, 2005, p. 389), words referring to general objects and situations connected with their everyday activity, e.g. sleeping, eating, walking, but also words reflecting individual, singular experiences (Ross, 2011, p. 53). One such word from the child's individual vocabulary might be the word *kam* or *kamień* (a stone), an object encountered (found) during daily walks. Also research by Nelson, suggests that children differ in terms of their vocabulary resources (Bates et al., 1988, p. 43). Also, the work presented by Hovewer and Lieven demonstrates the existence of an individual lexical resource relating to children's first words (Bates et al., 1988, p. 44). Szuman also points to this phenomenon by distinguishing such a category of words as "ascendant words", which are only just beginning to appear in children's vocabularies. They are understood by only a small percentage of chil-

dren, but, as Szuman notes, other children can successfully acquire them (Szuman, 1968, p. 33). In addition, it is important to note that limited phonological proficiency prevents young children from using the full names of objects. They often omit unaccented syllables, e.g. *ja* will mean *jabłko* (an apple), while *koko* – *kotek* (a kitten) (Schaffer, Kipp, 2012, p. 385).

Szuman, in turn, points out that children who have similar experiences and are brought up in similar conditions enrich and develop their vocabularies in a similar way. “This is reflected in the fact that in the vocabulary of children belonging to the same year group there is a certain number of words that are the same (denoting the same things and phenomena) or content-wise similar (i.e. denoting different things and phenomena, but belonging to the same fields of reflection of reality)” (Szuman, 1968, p. 28).

The findings also indicate that young children do not reflect past experiences in language, although, “there is evidence that experiences that occurred before the emergence of language, and which can be remembered as non-verbal, are not easily “translatable into language” (Fivush, Nelson, 2004, p. 547). This fact proves, as Vygotsky points out, “that in early childhood, words do not yet separate from the objects they designate, and the child cannot call the same thing by different words” (Wygotski, 2002, p. 122). The results of experiments with young children suggest that the attempt to rename an object by handing it to the child and pronouncing a name other than the conventional name fails. Children do not understand such a change (Wygotski, 2002, p. 122).

However, it can be said with certainty that when learning new words, children must first know and understand their conventional meanings. Here, Rosch’s concept can be useful in explaining that the conceptual category “animals” makes it possible to categorise together such real-world objects as dogs, cats, horses, elephants, etc., which, although they have many characteristics that differ from each other, also have features that can be considered as their common core. Categories allow people to share the world and enable them to organise their experiences. Thanks to their existence, as Vygotsky observes, a simple generalisation can be made. “Every element a child shares with an adult or receives from an adult is a generalisation” (Wygotski, 2002, p. 113). He highlights, however, that the child cannot generalise absent objects, neither can talk about them (Wygotski, 2002, p. 113).

The findings suggest that it does not take children long to work out the meaning of words. In many cases, they use a process known as “fast mapping”. According to Clark, the process of acquiring new words takes place in four steps:

1. The child creates an R-representation for a form of the word *x*. First, the child creates the representation for comprehension. This includes the meaning that the child assigns to the word. The R-representation also contains auditory information about the sounds and their ordering, which is

necessary to identify the word. When the child hears a particular sequence of sounds, he or she will be able to recognise it as having already been heard, and will be able to arrive at the meaning assigned to it. Without creating an R-representation, the child would not know if he or she had already heard the word before. Nor would he or she be able to keep track of the subsequent practical “usages” of the word.

2. The child tries to create an M-representation for x . This happens when the form (R-representation) has already been stored in memory. The child may begin to try to use it in his or her own utterances, that is, to create a representation for speaking. However, saying a word so that it will be recognisable requires a lot of practice and is not easy. This representation, in addition to the previous data, contains full information about the articulation of the individual sounds and their sequence in the word.
3. The child activates the M-representation and, by monitoring the spoken form, compares it with the possessed R-representation for x . The child attempts to compare the M-representation with adult pronunciation or with his/her own R-representation. In this way, he or she can grasp the incongruence between the word formation and word comprehension.
4. The child improves the M-representation for x . If the child's statement does not match the stored pattern (R-representation), so the child attempts to modify the mismatched elements and makes another attempt at naming (Clark, 2007, pp. 167–169).

The process of mastering new words increases noticeably between eighteen and twenty months of a child's life (Schaffer, Kipp, 2012, p. 387). In experimental situations, it has been proven that after the first presentation of a word, children already showed an understanding of a certain part of its meaning used by adults (Gleason, Ratner, 2005, p. 390). In arriving at the conventional meaning of a new word, they formulate and test hypotheses concerning its meanings. If they do not find a name to describe this conceptual structure, they look for a suitable word or word-forming rule in the language of their community, asking for names, correcting their own word choices and aligning meanings with adult words (Borowiec, 2014, p. 42). Tomasello explains this phenomenon as follows: a child learning new words already has experience in interpreting non-linguistic communicative intentions of an adult, he or she may conclude that the adult making strange sounds is trying to communicate with him or her. “Once they have established this, they need to decide what exactly the adult is trying to communicate to them by using a new sound or word (almost always embedded in a longer utterance. In order to do this, firstly, they must determine the adult's general communicative intention, and then the specific role, or roles, that the new word plays in a given communicative situation” (Tomasello, 2007, p. 216). This fact of shared attention between the

adult and the child is also observed by Wood when he points out that “the adult makes a rapprochement between the act of communication and the early observations of the world made by the child, thus linking language to reality” (Wood, 2006, p. 134). In turn, Vygotsky invokes the concept of a figure and its background when describing this phenomenon. According to him, a child hearing adult speech can create a more extensive background than the figures available to him or her. By learning the structure of the relationship between the figure and background, the child masters the structure in its entirety (Wygotski, 2002, p. 111).

Certainly, learning words and assigning meanings to objects is a process of establishing intentions. It requires that children not only understand the adults’ intentions directed at external objects. They must also pay attention to that object together with the adult. A linguistic symbol (a word) is therefore a sound (a set of sounds) “used by two or more beings during interaction to direct each other’s attention and thereby, to share attention. Without this awareness, this ability would be compared to that of a dog knowing that the sound »dinner« means that food is about to appear. However, it would not be the ability to inter-subjectively use linguistic symbols to follow the attention of others, to direct their attention to something and to share the attention with others” (Tomasello, 2007, pp. 216–217).

The results of the study indicate that initially children only use words in a certain limited context. For example, a child may only use the word “rabbit” to refer to a favourite mascot. He or she will no longer use this word in reference to an animal in a pet shop or in an illustration in a book by that name. This phenomenon is referred to in psycholinguistics as overconstruction of meaning. It occurs when a word is used by a child to describe fewer objects than it is in adult language. Another phenomenon common among children in this first period of word mastery is the overextension of meanings. Thus, a child uses the word “cat”, for example, not only to describe this animal, but also to name a rabbit. There are also cross-range terms. The child simultaneously narrows and expands the correct scope, e.g. using the word “dog” to name only large dogs and at the same time when referring to calves (Borowiec, 2014, p. 41). In individual cases, as Clark observes, children’s words can completely miss the meaning in adult language (Clark, 2007, p. 140), these are words with a disconnected meaning scope. These phenomena related to the specificity of children’s explanation of concepts are explained by the fact that young children cannot know all the information that adults know about the surrounding world. Therefore, at an early stage, they have to base the meanings of words on just a few features among those that adults associate with these terms. Development in this case involves the gradual addition of features until the full adult-typical set is acquired. Nelson points to two phenomena: “contextual flexibility” and words related to the immediate context. She demonstrates that children who discover broader word meanings earlier reach the stage of “flexible

vocabulary”, detached from the immediate context, than children who use concepts narrowly (Bates et al., 1988, pp. 45–46). Children in the former group are likely to be better at naming new objects that fit into a broader, already familiar to them, category.

Vygotsky emphasises that in this first period of development the child’s object-formed world is only just coming into being, hence the child asks questions about what he or she sees. These questions are primarily directed towards caregivers. The author also refers to the fact that words and their meanings are learned by children in the course of social relations.

CONCLUSIONS

Between sixteen and twenty-four months of age, another stage in the child’s development can be observed. It is called the naming explosion, when the child’s vocabulary expands very rapidly. Soon the first two-word utterances also emerge. An analysis of the two-word utterances of children from different language backgrounds shows that children all over the world express the same thoughts and intentions in similar utterances. Certainly, the transition to two- and then multi-word utterances, allows children to better reflect their thoughts because, as we know, the development of speech also leads to the development of verbal thinking. And the child’s mastery of speech allows them to express their own needs and expectations of their environment more and more precisely, to influence other people. Furthermore, the development of language facilitates the symbolic representation of objects and people. Thanks to this ability, children can, at later stages of development, manipulate objects in thought, plan actions, even without having to carry out these plans (Schaffer, 2005, p. 193), etc.

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