

Pačesová, Jaroslava

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

The Nature of the Data

The present study is based on the data dealing with the linguistic development of a Czech-speaking boy recorded since his first speech utterances till the time of stabilizing the phonetic realizations of the different phonemes.

As the tempo of linguistic development is not the same in all children in general, some of them mastering their language more rapidly than others, the time treatment was abandoned and the language development of the child investigated was divided into three periods, namely, the stage of the first fifty words, the stage of the first one hundred words and the stage of the first five hundred words, the phonemic analysis of each of them showing the ways in which the language is gradually mastered.

In order to arrive at a more revealing picture of the child's structure of vocalic and consonantal phonemes, it seemed essential to view these phonemes as being constituted of bundles of articulatory features. The procedure was based on articulatory rather than acoustic features, in spite of the fact that the importance of the acoustic orientation is undoubted, especially for the reason that the bearer of the function of language as an instrument of mutual communication is generally—and more so in the child's speech—its acoustic component. It should be kept in mind, however, that in the present work no attempt will be made to identify distinctive features as such, the aim of this feature analysis being — similarly as in R. Weir's study—merely a description of articulatory sound features which the child in the proposed three stages has learned well, which are still unstable in his system in the first, second or even third stage of his linguistic development, and, last but not least, which of the articulatory features based on Standard Czech are still ignored by him. Another reason inclining us to adopt the articulatory terminology is the fact that this terminology is common in papers on child's speech and thus offers a comparison of the feature analysis in a Czech child with the results of other investigators, namely R. Weir, R. Burling, R. W. Albright, W. F. Leopold, etc.

No attention was paid to the preparatory stages of the language development, i.e. to the crying period and the babbling period. In these stages, belonging more or less to the sphere of the psychologist rather than to the sphere of the linguist, babbling or the child's unstructured making of sounds are but articulatory exercises, similar in the speech of any child, being thus of no relevance in the establishment of the phonemic contrasts specific for the given language, not to speak of the fact that it occurs even with deaf and blind children.

We have consulted a good deal of literature on child language in order to draw comparisons with data reported by other investigators and thus to try to contribute further to our knowledge of speech development in children generally.

The Characteristics of the Child Investigated

The boy is a first-born child and was brought up in the home environment up to the age of twelve months when he was put into a day nursery. Apart from slight children's illnesses he was healthy and his physical development has always been about the average for his age. His mental age has been, on the other hand, somewhat ahead of his chronological age. As for his language development, his imitations were from the very beginning accurate and his speech was quite intelligible not only to the members of the family but also to strangers without undue interpretations by the mother. Being a strongly verbal child, he enjoyed using language a great deal and especially at the age of two he showed creative ability and receptivity for language feeling, noticeable both for the perfect mastering of the prefixes, endings and suffixes and for the wit shown in his selection of the most suitable models for his neologisms. By means of minimum interference with the phonological structure of an unknown expression he achieved its meaning while selecting the most typical characteristic of the subject in question.

In his environment the boy was exposed to the influence of the local variant of the city of Brno. In spite of the fact that his parents tried to offer speech models of Standard Czech, it is quite natural that the colloquial variants appeared in the boy's speech, being confirmed by intercourse with his contemporaries. The boy, however, never adopted the palatalized allophones of standard phonemes as children usually do in the first stages of their linguistic development.

The child's stay in the day nursery exerted no retardatory effect on his linguistic development.

Notes on the Sign Conventions

The phonetic and phonemic alphabetic representations utilized in the study follow the system common in Slavistic works which differ, in some instances, from the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association. A definition of the value of the alphabetic signs can be found in the following table:

Vowels

<i>a, e, i, o, u,</i>	symbols used for short neutral vowels
<i>a., e., i., o., u.</i>	. indicates that the sound represented by the preceding symbol is half-long
<i>a:, e:, i:, o:, u:</i>	: indicates that the sound represented by the preceding symbol is long
<i>a::, e::, i::, o::, u::</i>	:: indicates that the sound represented by the preceding symbol is extra-long
<i>ɛ̟</i>	̟ placed below a vowel-letter indicates that the vowel has open lip-rounding
<i>ɛ̠</i>	̠ placed below a vowel-letter indicates that the vowel has close lip-rounding
<i>ɛ̠̠</i>	̠̠ placed below a vowel-letter indicates that the vowel has very close lip-rounding
<i>æ</i>	a symbol used for short rounded <i>e</i>
<i>Ø:</i>	a symbol used for long rounded <i>e</i>
<i>ə</i>	a symbol used for a reduced vowel

Consonants

Key-words are not required for the following consonants: *p, b, m, t, d, n, k, g, f, v, s, z, ʃ, r, h*. We give below key-words for the remaining consonants appearing in the text:

<i>p^h</i>	<i>h</i> indicates that the preceding consonant is aspirated
<i>ɸ</i>	a symbol used for bilabial <i>f</i>
<i>w</i>	a symbol used for bilabial <i>v</i>
<i>R</i>	a symbol used for bilabial <i>r</i>
<i>t', d', n'</i>	' indicates that the sound represented by the preceding symbol is palatalized
<i>l, ð, ñ</i>	ˇ indicates that the sound represented by preceding symbol is palatal
<i>š, ž</i>	symbols representing the pair of a voiceless and voiced hushing sibilant
<i>c, č</i>	symbols representing the voiceless affricates
<i>ʒ, ʝ</i>	symbols representing the voiced affricates
<i>ɳ</i>	a symbol representing the velar allophone of /n/
<i>x</i>	a symbol representing the velar voiceless fricative <i>ch</i>
<i>l̥, n̥</i>	̥ placed below a consonant-letter indicates that the consonant is syllabic
<i>ɸ̥</i>	a symbol representing the voiceless <i>ɸ</i>

Other signs

	placed behind a vowel letter indicates the realization of the glottal stop
<i>ˈ</i>	indicates that the following syllable is stressed
[]	phonetic representation identified by being enclosed in square brackets
//	phonemic representation is identified by being enclosed by diagonals
1, 5, 9	numbers denoting the age of the child investigated: the first number indicates the year, the other the month, the third the day.