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Word Creativity of Seven-Year-Old Children

SUMMARY

In the following article the issue of word-formation creativity of children aged 7 who start their primary education was discussed. Although it is about the time when the creativity should disappear, the children still use quite numerous neologisms in their speech. First-grade pupils form neologisms either using incorrect word-formation formatives or choosing incorrect base words, this way expressing a different way of interpreting the surrounding world. The conclusions quoted in the article were drawn thanks to the research conducted in the form of a quiz among the group of 30 children. The methodology implemented herein enabled finding out which word-formation category the children were best familiar with and in which category the children showed the greatest language creativity

Key words: word formation neologisms, conceptual neologisms, analogous word creativity

INTRODUCTION

During the development of a child's language a period of increased word creativity can be observed which is related to the pre-school age (Kaczmarek 1966; Chmura-Klekotowa, 1971; Zarębina, 1965).

The category of diminutive names is the first type of word formation learnt by children. The evidence for the use of diminutives can be found in the language of 18 month old children. The general number of diminutives increases, also the number of spontaneous, expressions formed independently from adults, the usage of diminutives and the number of formatives (derivational morphemes) creating

diminutives and accompanying root words are increased. The number of diminutives in a child's vocabulary during this period exceeds the number of diminutives used by adults addressing the child (Haman, 2003). The formations triggering positive emotions precede other word-formation constructions in the child's language.

M. Zarębina (1980) attributes the development of the basis for the word-formation system to the period of rapid increase in vocabulary. It is then when word formation neologism, based on analogy, as well as on diminutives and augmentatives start to appear. The author mentions that, already at the pre-school age, "the capability of independent language creativity" exists, illustrated by numerous neologism expressed in children's speech. The children's language creativity then visibly intensifies. Parts of speech, within neologisms, appear in proportions similar to an adult's vocabulary – nouns constitute 50% of all neologisms, verbs come next, followed by adjectives and adverbs.

According to L. Kaczmarek (1966), the analogous word-formation creativity takes place during the period of specific child talk, between the ages of 3 and 7 years. In the first phase it is especially intensified and then gradually weakens in the following phases.

M. Chmura-Klekotowa (1971) dates the period of neologism formation to children between 2 and 7 years of age, claiming at the same time, that examples from younger and older children are scarce. With the majority of Polish children, analogous word formation occurs in the 3rd year, whereas the biggest intensity is in the 5th year, following which the number markedly decreases. The neologism order is similar for all children and depends on the extent of their abstraction. Nouns and verbs tend to occur during the initial stage of word formation development, whilst adjectives in the latter stage. The number of nouns increases gradually for children between the ages of 2 to 5, the greatest number of verbs recorded are for 3 and 6 year olds, whilst adjectives for 4 year olds. In the overall neologism count, the percentage of noun categories denoting bearers of qualities and doers of action rises with age. There is a gradual percentage decrease with age, in the general number of neologisms (apart from diminutives) for augmentative and feminine names, though for 6 year olds the number of such formations again increases (an increase in the emotional anxiety at this age).

As M. Chmura-Klekotowa points out, despite the indicated development correctness, children differ in the degree of word-formation development. The number of neologisms and frequency of their creation depend probably on a child's individual characteristics and on the conditions it is brought up in. Thus, both the beginning of expression creativity, as well as its intensity, vary according to the individual, which means that they can occur at different ages. They depend on the degree of a child's need to communicate as well as the mastered vocabulary at

a given stage and the morphological rules, and these in turn do not depend directly on the development age achieved.

New words in the child's vocabulary reflect the way the world is perceived by them. In a two part word-formation construction there is reflection of two-stage approach to ordering phenomena of reality. Objects, perceived firstly as a whole (or a collection of characteristics) are categorized into a specified conceptual class (this way new phenomena are classified into a general class of previously known concepts) and then, on the basis of distinguishing characteristics, these classes are extracted from other similar copies. Thus word-formation construction is a concise and shortened definition (Rozwadowski, 1921, Doroszewski, 1963).

To create names a child has to possess *a certain resource of perceptions and ideas as well as relevant names for them* and *a classification system together with a resource of language exponents for individual classes*. Thus, it is a name which *directs perception* as well as *orders perceptions and ideas* (Chmura-Klekotowa, 1971, 104–105). Disorders in a child's language formation appear gradually and slowly, followed by a stronger appearance, after which they begin to weaken, which can be explained by the ease with which phenomena disappear not strengthened by the environment. Therefore vanishing neologisms in a child's language is directly linked with the goal-oriented influence of schools (Chmura-Klekotowa, 1971).

THE AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The aim of the article is to depict word creativity of 7 year old children, starting their first year at primary school. According to published data on the subject, this is the time when neologism should disappear and be replaced by language normative uses. This is due to the widening of the children's language experience and the result of organized teaching at school, responsible for limiting and even totally superseding children's analogous language formation in speech. However, the influence of school on the study group was not strong as the research was carried out in September, i.e. in the month when the children just started their school education.

THE METHOD

The research material was collected from a group of 30 first year children in experimental trials conducted with the help of a specially constructed for this purpose word-formation questionnaire[1]. The quiz consisted of 100 questions re-

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[1] More precise information related to the structure of word-formation quiz and methodology of word-formation rules acquisition in E.Muzyka (2007).

garding names related to various noun categories. They included diminutives, expressive names such as augmentatives, feminine names (belonging to modification categories) as well as names of action performers, tools, creations and action objects, bearers of qualities and places (from among the mutation categories) [2].

Only modification and mutation categories were analyzed. Transposition categories were studied, but are omitted from the analyses. The material collected showed that it is essential, with the aim of motivating the child to create transposition construction, to adopt a different research tool to that designed and adopted for the research of the modification and mutation categories.

The material collected this way included, in total, about 3000 units.

The described research procedure is partly coherent with M.Chmura-Klekotowa's (1971) suggestion, who carried out an experiment on a group of 3 – 7 year old children, consisting of 20 questions inciting to the creation of neologisms which were names of people, things and actions. The whole experiment was arranged as a game due to the children's age.

In the research subject described herein, it was decided not use toys as an aid, as the children's age allowed it. Illustrations were used only as a "word-formation warm-up" preceding the proper study. Then, the children were shown a series of pictures with appropriate captions – paraphrases and word-formation constructions, i.e. examples of answers to the same type of questions included in the questionnaire. On the one hand, this "warm-up" was to facilitate the explanation to the children about the tasks in the questionnaire, whilst on the other, it was to inspire their language creativity related to word-formation. The children's attention was deliberately drawn towards formal semantic relationships between words also in the actual study. The individual questionnaire tasks were read out to the children with simultaneous control of their sight. The word from which the children were to form a word-formation construction was identified by underlining and additional information ("the word you will give is to be similar to the one I am showing").

RESULTS

Children starting their primary school education are capable of creating constructions belonging to particular word-formation categories. On average they created 80% modification constructions and 65% mutation constructions. They fared best with the creation of diminutive constructions (77% of possible answers) and feminine constructions (84% of possible answers) in the mutation categories;

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[2] The division of derivatives into modification, mutation and transposition categories was introduced by M.Dokulila (1971) and noun classification of word formation structure used in the quiz was suggested by R.Grzegorczykową (1982).

in the modification categories and names of personal and impersonal perpetrators (70% of answers).

Names of places (30%) and names of creations and objects (48%) turned out to be the most difficult to form. The children also had problems with forming expressive names (12%), however, in this case, one should not treat this result as binding. Searching for the cause of such a poor response to the correct formation of expressive names, it is impossible not to draw attention to the striking contrast between the ease of creating diminutives and the big problems in creating expressive names. It is highly probable that the techniques adopted in the questionnaire did not sufficiently motivate the children to express their relationship towards the named designators, which is a necessary condition for the creation of expressive names. This reasoning is supported by the fact that instead of the expected hypocoristic formations, the children created diminutives or phrases with diminutives, e.g.

Pies, który jest bardzo mały, bardzo ładny i dobry – *piesek, piesek dobry, dobry piesek, mały piesek, bardzo dobry piesek, piesek bardzo piękny, piesek malutki, malutki piesek, milutki piesek.*

(A dog which is very small, very pretty and good – doggy, doggy good, a good doggy, a small doggy, a very good doggy, doggy very beautiful, doggy small, a small doggy, a nice doggy.)

But, który jest bardzo mały i bardzo ładny – *bucik, bucik, butek, butki. ładny bucik, śliczny bucik, bardzo śliczne buciki, piękny bucik, jeszcze mniejszy bucik, bardzo malutki bucik.*

(A shoe which is very small and very pretty– a small shoe, a pretty small shoe, a lovely small shoe, extremely lovely small shoe, a beautiful small shoe, even smaller small shoe. a very small small shoe)

At times phrases with the base word appeared instead of the required expressive construction:

Pies, który jest bardzo mały, bardzo ładny i dobry – *dobry pies, mądry pies, pies domowy.*

(A dog which is very small, very pretty and good – a good dog, clever dog, domestic dog)

But, który jest bardzo mały i bardzo ładny – *mały but, but ładny, but mały i bardzo ładny, but mały dla klowna, but dla lalek. (A shoe which is very small and very pretty– a small shoe, a shoe pretty, a shoe small and very pretty, a shoe small for a clown, a shoe for dolls)*

This type of answers occurred more often in trials to form augmentatives:

Pies, który jest bardzo duży, brzydki i zły – *duży pies, zły pies, niedobry pies, bardzo niedobry pies, głupi pies, pies myśliwy, pies groźny myśliwy, pies zły na ludzi i gryzie.*

(A dog which is very big, ugly and bad – a big dog, an ugly dog, not good dog, very not good do, silly dog, hunting dog, fierce hunting dog, dog angry at people and bites)

But, który jest bardzo duży i bardzo brzydki – *brzydki but, but brzydki, duży, brzydki but, bardzo duży nieładny but, bardzo nieładny but duży, duży, bardzo brudny but, brudny but, brzydki kamasz, but głupi kamasz.*

(A shoe which is very big and very ugly–an ugly shoe, shoe ugly, a big ugly shoe, a very big, not pretty shoe, a very not pretty shoe big, big, very dirty shoe, dirty shoe, an ugly boot, shoe stupid boot)

Occurrence of answers in which the intended meaning was reached with lexical means and not word-formation structures, at the same time with few correct structures of expressive names being formed, indicates to the necessity of implementation of a different research methodology rather than to insufficient knowledge in the area of word-formation morphemes. The conclusion drawn from the collected material corroborated the other reference books that children generally use markedly more diversified resources of meliorative rather than pejorative formatives. In the group surveyed the children associated negative meaning with the affix –or and alternations in the base (*piechor, psior* 'psisko' – from 'dog') whereas positive meaning with affixes:–eczek; –uniek; –ątko; –uńka, –uńcia; –iczek; –aczek, as well as the change of flexional paradigm (–o) as well as alternations in the base with the participation of soft sounds (*pieseczek, piesuniek, piesiątko, psiuńka, psiuńcia, piesio* and *buciczek, bucio, buciaczek*).

Apart from the issue related to which categories are the easiest and the most difficult to learn by 7 year old children, there is an extremely interesting and important issue of creating neologisms in the children's language. M.Chmura-Klekotowa (1971, 100) defines word-formation neologisms as *words being word-formation structures created according to existing language patterns*. In this group, apart from conceptual neologisms where a non-standard interpretation of reality is reflected and new expressive forms, there are formations with incorrect formatives. The latter formations are the most common in the language of 7 year old. There are examples of word-formation constructions containing inadequate formatives in each of the word-formation category. The formatives either belong to the same category or not and they are often multi-functional formatives.

Diminutive constructions

Kot, który jest mały – *kociaczek, kociak kociątko. (A cat which is small)*

Kura, która jest mała – *kureczka. . (A hen which is small)*

But, który jest mały – *buciczek. butek, butki. . (A shoe which is small)*

Kura, która jest mała – *kurczę, kurczak, kurczątko, kurczaczek, kurczeto, kurek. (A hen which is small)*

Pies, który jest mały – *psiuńka, psiuńcia, piesiątko. (A dog which is small)*

Nóż, który jest mały – *nóżyk, nóżek. (A knife which is small)*

Feminine constructions

Pani kot (mama kotów; samica kota) – *kotek, kotek kobieta, kotka, kociak, kociczka, kotkowa, kicia, kici.*

(She-cat (cats' mum, female cat))

Pani lew (mama lwów; samica lwa) – *lewcia, lewka, lwiczka, lewanka. lewiki, lewica.*

(She-lion (lions'' mum, lioness))

Dziewczynka, która jest uczniem – *ucznica, uczniowa. (A girl who is a pupil)*

Names of doers of the action

Pani, która gotuje w kuchni –   *kucharzka.* (A lady who cooks)

Pani, która sprząta – *siątaczka, siątaczki, sprzątarka. .* (A lady who cleans)

Pani, która biega – *biegarka, że lubi biegać + biegarka, zawodniczka + biegarka, wuefiarka + biegarka, sporciarzka + biegarka, Dorotka + biegarka, pani biegnąca. .* (A lady who runs)

Pan, który zajmuje się robieniem filmów – *filmówca, filmacz, filmarz, filmiarz, pan filmiarz, filmur, filmor.*

.(A man who makes films)

Names of tools

Rzecz, która służy do otwierania butelek i konserw – *otwieraczka, otwieradło.* (A thing for opening bottles and tins)

Urządzenie, które służy do kopania dołów – *kopaczka.* (An equipment for digging holes)

Rzecz, którą ścieramy podłogi – *ścieraczka, ścieradło.* (A thing for wiping floors)

Names of creations and objects

Rzecz do jedzenia zrobiona z cukru – *cukierniczka, cukiernica, cukiernia.* (A thing to be eaten made of sugar)

Rzecz, o którą wycieramy o nią buty – *wycieranka.* (A thing to clean shoes in)

Urządzenie poruszane przez wiatr – *wietrzyk, wiaterka.* (A device moved by wind)

Rzecz, którą ludzie z cukru – *cukiernia.* (A thing which people make of sugar)

Names of bearers of qualities

Pan, który ma duże wąsy – *wąsak, wąsiak, wąsiarz , wąsarz, wąsaty, wąsiat, wąsek, wąsias, wąsnik, wąsalec, wąsyta.* (A man with a big moustache)

Pan, który dużo gra w karty – *karciak, karcielec, karcista, kartarz, kartownik, kar taniec, karcistas, karciel.*

(A man who plays cards a lot)

Pan, który jest bardzo gruby – *grubielec, grubelec.* (A man who is very fat)

Człowiek, który jest bardzo biedny – *biednarz, biedas, biedaszek.* (A man who is very poor)

Dziecko, które jest bardzo chude – *chudas, chudziarz, chuderlak, chudelec, chudek, chudach, chudziel.*

(A child who is very thin)

Names of places

Miejsce, gdzie ludzie kąpią się – *kąpiel, łazienka + do kąpania, w łazience + do kąpania, łazienka + kąpiel*;

(A place where people bathe)

Miejsce, gdzie ludzie pieką chleb – *piekarka, na ogniu + pieczeń.*(A place where people bake bread)

The biggest number of neologisms created according to the existing patterns in Polish language but with incorrect formatives are related to the category of attributive names. The characteristics of this word-formation category may influence such a situation. The names of bearers of qualities are not categorized, i.e. their formation is individual and it depends on what quality dominates perceptually at the moment and often it may be a random quality. They also tend to have a big degree of irregularity of meaning which is due to the fact that the meaning of a derivative cannot be specified on the basis of its structure as only some elements of the real meaning are expressed by the form (Grzegorczykowa, 1982; Grzegorczykowa, Puzynina, 1984). Attributive names include a great number of nicknames as well as characters from stories and films. Language creativity of children seems to be consistently encouraged and strengthened by the environment in this respect. A great number of neologisms in the category of doers of the action is worth noticing as well.

To sum it up, one can claim that neologisms of 7 year old children are the most productive word-formation category. Word-formation creativity increases in the formation of substantival names. There seem to be some analogy here to observations made by M. Chmura-Klekotowa (1971), on the basis of her research in the group of children in the wide age range between 1 year 11 months -12 years old. The category of names of doers of the action originating from verbs turned out to be the most productive and substantival names came the second. Whereas the group of children aged 7 described in the following article showed the biggest language creativity in their attempts to form names from nouns (not from verbs) and then to form the names of bearers of qualities (and not names of doers of the action). Thus, it can be assumed that a human being is in the centre of a 7 year-old child's interest, human activities and characteristics interest such children most, although their language experience to date is not sufficient enough to be able to name in a normative way the phenomena observed.

Among modification categories the biggest number of neologisms formed with incorrect formatives occurred in attempts to form the easiest word-formation category, namely diminutives. As seen from the material collected for many pu-

pils in Year 1 a phrase *a small animal* is a synonym of *a young animal*. Conse-
quently there is an identification of the two categories - of diminutive names
and of names of young beings. The children assign the same meaning both to the
formatives characteristic for the category of young beings and diminutive names,
i.e. suffix–ątko = suffix –ek, thus *kociątko = kotek* (respectively a young cat,
a small cat), *piesiątko = piesek* (respectively a young dog, a small dog), *kurczątko
= kurka* (respectively a young hen, a small hen). Regarding the names of objects
whose diminutives were to be formed in the quiz, the children at times used incor-
rect diminutive formatives, namely instead of the suffix–ik//–yk the suffix –ek
(*butek, nóżek* instead of *bucik, nożyk*)(respectively a small shoe, a small knife).
The formative –ik is a basic diminutive exponent for nouns in masculine gender
which serves many items and derivates new formations. The formative –ek is
preserved in few word classes, however they are quite large.[3]. It can be assumed
that in the situation where two formatives have the same meaning (are synonymic)
and only the pronunciation of the final sound in the word is decisive which for-
mative to use, first-grade pupils have few problems in choosing the right suffix.
These phenomena may suggest that frequency of use of a specific formative (the
higher frequency the easier acquisition) as well as the knowledge of phonetic and
morphophonological rules (the process of making progress in word-formation is
slowed down by the necessity of adhering to these rules to choose the right forma-
tive and of making alternation in the stem) influence the acquisition process of
rules and word-formation resource

The phenomenon, important in the word- formation creativity of the 7 year
old children, is related to problems with building correct word-formations where
co-existing formatives occur, i.e. morphophonological alternations of the base.
It is manifested in various word-formation categories and related among other
things to choosing by the children the formatives which do not trigger any al-
ternations, e.g. the occurrence of the word *bucik* instead of *butek* (a small shoe)
and instead of a feminine name *kocica* – the formation *kotka* (a female-cat). The
constructions which require implementation of morphophonological alternations
in the base pose a difficulty for the children aged 7 and the neologisms occurring
quite frequently such as *lewka, lewica* – instead of *lwica* (a female-lion)*, chudelec*

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[3] 3. Formatives –ek, –ik //–yk are exponents of diminutive in masculine gender. The use of
each of them depends on the pronunciation of the last sound. In a great number of diminutive they
occur alternatively. At present the formative–ik//–yk, is said to be dominant and derives new for-
mations with various stem endings (e.g. sz, ż, cz, c, dz, rz, t, j, ń, dź, s, n, d). At the same time it is
emphasized that the formative –ek forms regularly only noun diminutives whose stem ends with
a velar sound or r; these formations, however, are numerous and due to this the formations with
suffixes –ek are greater in numbers than the formations with –ik (compare. Grzegorczykowa 1982;
Grzegorczykowa , J. Puzynina 1984).

– instead of *chudzielec* (a thin person) or already mentioned *nóżyk* –instead of *nożyk* (a small knife)*,* prove the point.

Conceptual neologisms constitute a separate group of examples corroborating the fact of the word- formation creativity of the 7 year old children, reflecting a different way of the children's world ordering from the one established in the language (Chmura-Klekotowa, 1971). In the material obtained from the quiz research this type of neologisms occurred as well; however, it was not so numerous. The greatest number of such formations occurred in attempts to make constructions belonging to the category of substantival names of doers of the action:

Pan, który biega – *sporciarz, sportowista, sportowy, cyrkownik*. (A man who runs)

Pani, która biega – *sportowistka, sportowica, sortownica, sportowicka, sportowa, sportsmenka, pani wuefiarka*. (A woman who runs)

Pan, który zajmuje się robieniem filmów – *kamerarz, aparator*. (A man who makes films)

Pan, który pracuje w kuchni – *pracownik*. (A man who works in the kitchen)

Pani, która pracuje w kuchni – *piekarka*. (A woman who works in the kitchen)

In the case of bearers of qualities there were fewer conceptual neologisms and they were generally related to substantival structures (as it was the case with neologisms made with incorrect formatives).

Pan, który gra dużo w karty – *kraciak, kornista, gracz, pokerowiec*. (A man who plays cards a lot)

Conceptual neologisms created from other parts of speech and belonging to different categories were marginal and they related to:

– Names of tools: *zakrątka*, (shoe lace) *kapsnik* (opener), *ogrzewacz* (fan).

– Names of places: *pychotka* (canteen), *bibliotekarka* (book shop).

CONCLUSION

In the vocabulary of the children starting their primary education neologism still occur. They are not a common occurrence, however their presence is to be noted and regarded as important. The biggest number of neologisms are created using incorrect formatives, but within the existing framework in the Polish language. The knowledge of formatives and their distribution is not complete at the age of 7. The children tend to confuse the formatives of the same category or form structures with implementation of formatives from other word-formation category.

The first-grade pupils still have problems with word-formation structures created with implementation of less common formatives. Their problems with structures requiring morphophonological alternations in word-formation basis (co-existing formatives) are also significant. The sporadic phenomena are constructions

with endings which are not formatives (*biednac* 'biedak' (a poor man) *brodacet* 'brodacz' (a man with a beard))*,* as well as contaminations (*wąsowierz, wąsonos* 'wąsacz' (a man with a moustache)).

The first-grade pupils do not seem to have too many conceptual neologisms in their vocabulary. However, there is a possibility that there are more conceptual neologisms in children's spontaneous utterances than in the material provided by the quiz.

The children aged 7 form diminutives, feminine names and names of doers of the action with greatest ease. They are the most creative in forming substantival formations – names of bearers of qualities (neologisms formed with incorrect formatives) and names of doers of the action (neologisms formed from a different base than the targeted one). Thus the process of name formation on the basis of nouns is for such children more difficult (as learnt later) than forming the constructions from verbs.

The occurrence of word-formation neologisms, mainly in the attempts to form the names of people, indicates the present range of the children's interests. The first-grade pupils expand their experience, enter a new environment, however their knowledge of formatives and word-formation rules is not sufficient.

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