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Creation and reporting in children's images of emotions (based on the utterances of intellectually normal children and children with Down syndrome)

SUMMARY

How to paint for example joy, fear, sadness, and anger? This question was asked to children aged 6 and 10 years, and children with Down syndrome. While the utterances of intellectually normal children are characterized by specific originality, expressiveness and genuineness because they are the outcome of creative thinking, the utterances of children with Down syndrome show dialogic, situational, and reporting character. Nevertheless, they have a cognitive value because they organize these children's knowledge of the world of emotions.

Keywords: creation, originality, reporting, situationality, dialogicality, Down syndrome.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of relations between language, thinking, and reality is the fundamental issue in the cognitive theory, while organizing the knowledge of the creative role of language in constructing the surrounding world is a difficult task and doomed to some failure. When examining the idea that assigns active role in perceiving reality, we encounter theses that contain extremely similar propositions, i.e. "language creates, stimulates one to think", "our way of experiencing the world depends on language; language marks off the limits of this world and assigns meanings to the objects in this world" (cf. Kwaśnica 1991, 41 and 44).

When speaking about the active role of language in getting to know reality, we often wonder whether language helps or impedes our "struggle" with the external

world. We might cite the words of J. Maćkiewicz, who writes on the subject in her article *Świat widziany poprzez język* [The world seen through language] (1987).

„Language unites people both in time and space. Owing to language man is not condemned to utilize his/her own experiences, (...) s/he does not start from scratch but from the point that others have reached. Together with the language, man receives a store of experience and patterns (...) these experiences and patterns are not only communicated through language but are inherent in language itself (...).”

At the same time, linguistic conservatism causes the linguistic image of the world established in the system to become more and more inadequate, more and more contrary to practice. In our speech – despite the Copernican revolution – *stars always keep fading always, and the sun always rises in the blue sky* (144–145).

These theories from the field of linguistic determinism show that language codes human experience, thereby imposing the ways of categorizing the world. According to these concepts human thinking always depends on the language that man uses and on the community s/he lives in. This means that language influences the way the reality is reflected in the human mind.

These are not indisputable theories, however. According to many psychologists, e.g. D. McNeill (1980, 172–202) language plays a significant role in molding the human memory but not in the process of perception. The participation of language increases as the difficulty of a task increases, when children use the knowledge accumulated in memory rather than use current perception (Brown 1980, 371–397). In Poland it is Ida Kurcz (1987) who represents the position of moderate language determinism, arguing that there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the world and linguistic knowledge. They are two different systems which use different codes in the mind; nevertheless, they are interrelated and condition each other (*ibid*, 19). Psycholinguistic literature most often analyzes two models of knowledge in general: the model of knowledge of the world (advanced by Mertindale and Minsky, cited after Kurcz 1987), and the model of linguistic knowledge (Rice 1987; Kurcz 1987), which in turn is proposed “under the banner” of the linguistic image of the world (Bartmiński 1990; Ożdżyński 1995; Kiełlar-Turska 1997).

An extremely significant role in accumulating the knowledge of the surrounding reality is played by an individual’s experience. According to T. Krzeszowski (1997, 25) “everything we know and believe in depends on our personal experiences that activate the corresponding areas of our cognitive system, which is the dormant/latent sphere of our mind”. In the case of preschool children (aged six years) who took part in the testing, it is naïve, natural experience “not disturbed” by school education. Ten-year-old children acquire increasingly rich linguistic

experience in the course of school education, whereas in the group of Down's syndrome children we are certainly dealing with decidedly poorer linguistic and cognitive experience.

S. Szuman believed that the development of ideas, knowledge and concepts that the child uses depends on his/her experience and on "what his/her environment talks about" (Szuman 1985, 25). Differences in the linguistic development of individual children are determined by the type of educational environment and individual mental abilities that make it possible to accumulate their increasing experience (knowledge). It should also be taken into consideration that children understand and perceive the surrounding reality far better and more precisely than they can express this in words. Nevertheless, "it is language that underlies the organization of conscious and clear thinking" (*ibid*, 1182).

Depending on the level of their mental development and linguistic skills children construct utterances and judgments in a more or less correct way, more or less consistent with the reality spoken about. Utterances contain the knowledge of the little language users, their judgments and opinions on a subject. Preschool children use first of all everyday knowledge, paying attention to the features of objects and phenomena established in society, that are almost stereotypical.

Frequently, their utterances can be examined in the context of linguistic creation resulting from openness of thinking, individual perceptions, and from rich imagination (on this subject cf.: Śliwa 1993, 117–132; Ożdżyński 1995, 169–184; Jęczeń 2007, 133–171). Utterances of this type manifest their thoughts and concretize individual experiences.

In junior schoolchildren (11–12 year old) a realistic attitude is still observable, which is more oriented towards the world of objects rather than ideas and concepts. This attitude is accompanied by immense perceptiveness and the ability to find details (Przetacznikowa 1978, 133). At this age children enter the stage of operational-formal thinking and consequently, the possibility of formulating hypotheses and conclusions appears.

However, until adolescence, the child's thinking is animistic (J. Piaget 1966, 85), and the fairy-tale interpretation of the world is consistent with his/her own way of comprehending everything (Bettelheim 1985, 103; cited after Guzik 1995, 327).

What about the children whose cognitive development is retarded or disturbed? The authors who study the language of mentally retarded children contend that despite lexical poverty, the low level of syntactic skills and far worse acquisition of grammar norms, these children communicate with the people around them, and they can start a conversation with someone and keep it going. They are always able to muster enough courage to present their skills in this respect (Minczakiewicz 1995, 411). Therefore, based on their knowledge and linguistic capacities, will they be able to answer the question: *How to draw feelings?*

Each child is a natural creator, according to R. Gloton and C. Clero (1988, 54). S/he expresses his/her abilities through language, gesture, drawings, and through other forms of motor activity. What does children's linguistic creativity concerning this portion of reality which is emotions look like?

OWN INVESTIGATIONS

The goal of my investigation was to present children's convictions relating to the ways of representing emotions¹, and their attempts to imagine how a particular emotion phenomenon can be drawn. The studied utterances were produced from children aged six and ten years, and by mentally retarded children with Down syndrome. The analysis covers only four basic emotions: fear, anger, joy, and sadness.

While collecting materials, I applied the method resembling the one used to obtain information from children and described by J. Piaget in 1929, in his book *The Child's Conception of the World*. The publication describes studies on the way children comprehend such phenomena as thoughts and dreams. Piaget called this method "a clinical interview". It has the form of a casual conversation during which the answers to the questions asked demonstrate how children think about a subject. The method shows Piaget's persistence and ability to ask very detailed and very different questions. At the same time, while reading the reports of conversations contained in the book, we notice the shadow of "danger" stemming from the fact that the author suggested certain concepts which the children did not use before. J. Piaget (*ibid*, 19) himself stressed clearly that, when asking questions, suggesting is not easy to avoid. A way out is to formulate questions in the child's language and to ask "thorough questions" (*ibid*, 23), because "a suggested opinion" is "essentially momentary". It is enough to let the child talk for a while and ask him/her indirectly about the same things; a suggested opinion is a "parasite" among the child's thoughts and the observations of this type are quickly forgotten.

The foregoing cogitations by J. Piaget could possibly be connected with the theory of cognitive dissonance, which is discussed by J. Ożdżyński and G. Ożdżyński in their article (2013, 157-165). In accordance with the assumptions of this theory the authors believe that "...people (including children?) feel the need for inner harmony between *their* convictions. Disturbance of this harmony produces a state of unpleasant tension inducing an individual to act in order to restore the harmony or at least reduce the degree of divergence between his/her *own convictions*."

¹ In the present article I will use the terms feeling and emotion interchangeably.

RESULTS OF TESTING

To the question asked: *How do you think, can we draw ...* here the chosen emotion, e.g. *fear*; was named - the children usually answered – *Yes*. Here are the examples of ideas of the six-year-olds concerning drawings that represented:

Fear:

You can draw very, very big eyes – we say that fear has big eyes/ [You can draw] a ghost, a terrible monster/ A scared face/ Darkness and awfully big eyes/ A girl and a man scolding her/ A scarecrow because it scares away the birds in the garden/ A vicious dog, a stranger, storm in the sky, a tarantula/ Weeping children whose faces are wet with tears/.

Anger is imagined as:

You draw an angry face, an enraged man/ Draw a man and he gets angry..., I mean he is narked, and draw the teeth, that ... that he shows them like this and he has terrible eyes, with such angry eyes and the mouth getting angry/ The drawing would show a man who is beating someone. When people are fighting, they get awfully angry/ Two girls who are quarrelling/ A girls is throwing a doll around, or a boy is throwing a toy car or blocks/.

Joy is a special kind of feeling because children's images of it are highly original. Six-year-olds are extremely creative, and their utterances are rich and full of sophisticated comparisons, for example:

I would draw a bride and a bridegroom/ [I would draw] the whole family, each of them with a smiling face/ A smiling girl who just got a present/ In the picture Mother would be buying me a doggie/ Someone's running towards somebody and throwing their arms around the other's neck/ Birds perching on braches and opening their beaks/ A baby all smiles/ The smiling sun, the blue skies/ Beautiful, colorful flowers/ I would draw spring because joy is like spring/ You can draw a whole lot of money, gold, and diamonds/.

Sadness

A man with the lowered head/The face looking down/ The smile reversed in the other direction/ I would draw rain, it is raining and cloudy/ A girl with a sad face/You can draw tears in someone's eyes/ My Mother because there are days when she is sad/ A sad snowman which is melting/ Autumn weather/ The Ugly, Sad Duckling/ A sick animal in a large ... terrible forest/ A cat which is sad that milk is not pouring from the sky/ The willow is always sad because its leaves are drooped – perhaps I could draw it?/.

Examples of utterances of fourth-graders

Fear is perceived as:

Devils, all kinds of apparitions, ghosts / The dead because we don't know entirely know what death is about/ A dog barking at a little child/ A spider chasing a man or walking on his

hand/ Wolves howling in the forest/ A frightened man who would have his eyes open wide, a terrible face, and the mouth agape /A man sitting huddled in the corner / A ghost who frightens people, or simply a scarecrow/ Dark night, and thunder and lightning/ a UFO invasion/.

Anger would be depicted as:

A man who has a stern, angry face/A dog baring its teeth/ Mother when she is beating the child with a belt/ War, when the states attack one another/ The sky before the storm, stormy colors/ A man clenching his teeth and with tense muscles/ Someone with a menacing face and red with anger, shouting/.

Joy is projected as:

I would draw a child opening a present/ The smiling sun/ A smiling face/ A beaming, broad smile from ear to ear / A man meeting a person he missed and wanted to see very much/ Blooming flowers/ A funfair/ Spring, with birds signing and flowers blooming/ Grade A or Excellent in the class register/ A family going walking/ Me playing the ball with my friend/.

Utterances of ten-year-olds concerning **sadness** are as follows:

When drawing sadness I would draw crying people/ Dead birds or fish along spoilt water/ A person with tear in his/her eyes and sad face/ A sad face, the mouth with its corners turned down/ A child saying goodbye to his/her mother and crying/ A child sitting in the corner/ Tears on the face, glazed eyes /A sad mouth and glazed eyes/ People looking at photographs... souvenirs/ Plants that are withering because no one will water them/ Sad birds and animals in cages being sold on the market/.

It should be admitted that the perception of emotions by children does not essentially depart from the knowledge of the adults. It appears, however, that children's observations are far richer as far the comparison of emotions to the phenomena in the world of nature is concerned. Moreover, children's imagination "draws eclectically upon all possible sources: from the present, from memories, and reminiscences" (Guzik 1995, 333).

The utterances of the six-year-olds are characterized by specific originality, expressiveness, and genuineness. They are the result of highly creative thinking, which stimulates imagination and memory, and is directly related to the language they use because it is only by using language that we can compare things remote in time and space.

The language spoken by the ten-year-old children is the conventional one, the language of the adults. During school education they acquire linguistic experience in using abstract notions, they avoid diminutives, and their utterances do not have linguistic errors.

Studies by many specialists who investigate the language of children have shown that "each man in the first several years of his/her life is a *brilliant linguist*

– the creator of his/her own language. The child's language is an individual and unique product until it begins to resemble the language of the adults" (Krakowiak, 2005, 86).

The ways of presenting emotions by the 10–12-year-old children with Down syndrome

Their utterances in this field are a manifestation of "a different kind of linguistic creativity". The linguistic experience of these children is smaller and limited even when speech therapy treatment begins fairly early and it is conducted in a regular and correct manner. On account of coexistent cognitive deficits, the children with Down syndrome are in the state of "deficiency" of linguistic, communicative, and cultural competence in the area of memory, attention, and thinking. They construct their utterances based on the knowledge that they have. Here are examples of utterances in this group:

I would draw a face/ Bad weather/ Trees with leaves falling/ Are you joking? Why are you asking? I doon't know (*discouraged voice*) Don't say that, I am cheerful/ When there is no sun and water, leaves are falling, when (plants) have broken branches/ When it is raining and the cat is outside/.

The last utterance is exceptional in this respect because a vast majority of children are convinced that plants and animals *do not do anything*, hence they are not sad, cheerful, or angry. Only *the sun shines to children* although it sometimes *has a snotty nose*. This association may have arisen by analogy to children who, in colloquial language, sometimes have "snotty noses". Sometimes the expressions they use have the form of metaphors, e.g. *joy has open heart*, *the sun hid into the water* or of proverbs, e.g. *children and fish don't have their voice* [children should be seen, not heard]. Especially worth noting is the appearance of these constructions. To what extent do they evidence linguistic creativity, and to what extent can they be ignored, because they only copy adult utterances?

The children often reacted with discouragement, answering: *give me a break; it's over; I don't want to; are you kidding? I won't say; what are you asking for? I don't want to speak*; [Polish: *nooo*] – *yeah, yeah*; [Polish: *taak nooo*] – *yeppp, yeah yeah* – this lengthening of sounds demonstrated characteristic discouragement in my interlocutors. The children then did not attempt any verbal activity, and just as often they hastily formulated their judgments without thinking at all. Their utterances usually took the form of an isolated or recurrent event recalled from memory, in which they themselves took part, e.g. *when I was away on holiday; when I was staying in hospital; when Viola paints children's faces; when*

I am watching a fairy story; when a friend is beating; when I stay at home alone, and the like.

The utterances produced by Down children on their own show what an important role in the child's development is exercised by the correctly developing language because "thought develops based on the child's acquired skill to express it (the thought) by means of appropriate words and sentences (...). Acquiring a more and more ample vocabulary, the child (...) learns to formulate and express his/her thoughts, communicate them to the environment, and acquires the human, linguistically developed awareness of the reality" (Szuman 1968, 7). Their answers are frequently awkward and devoid of sense. It is difficult in this case to speak of linguistic creativity - we speak and read more often about the superficial acquisition of grammar rules, poor vocabulary, and speech disorders. The last problems make their speech incoherent and incomprehensible. Consequently, we sometimes give up longer attempts to reach a successful understanding. Can therefore a mentally handicapped child, under the optimum family or school, etc. conditions, learn the linguistic abilities of the child age and retain them as long as possible? (cf. discussion by K. Krakowiak on the creativity of hard-of-hearing children, *ibid*, 87). I do not think the child can fully manage, at least because of the cognitive and mental deficits concomitant with this syndrome. The two spheres substantially modify "the course of the process of language acquisition by the child" (*ibid*, 87).

The studied children found it very difficult to answer the question: *How to paint joy, or sadness, hanger, or fear?* because the question referred to abstract concepts and was connected with the sphere of imagination, which is probably not developed enough to form an image of any feeling in the mind and to talk about this using the language. The task was too difficult and was beyond their capabilities since it was a mental assignment although it referred to individual experiences.

They cope far better with conversations during which they can talk about an event that was for example the cause of the state being defined, in this case – *joy*.

Question: Are you a cheerful person? Are you often pleased?

Answer 1: *When I was on holiday... and there was the sun. The sun hid in the water ... and it was dark. There were games: running, we played ball, there was dancing. We went to the beach. I'll go once again. I ate with Mother. Dad came for breakfast, there was not enough room. I sat on the knee.*

Answer 2: *When I was staying in hospital, with Johnny (when in hospital the girl got a teddy bear from her parents; she called it John after the doctor's name) I stayed with my legs in plaster for a long time. The doctor was cool. I exercised my legs in the swimming pool. I learned to walk in the bike. I exercised with some lady. The doctor wept when I was going back home. He said I was the best patient.*

These utterances cannot be regarded as unsuccessful linguistic combinations. They are colloquial ones, characterized by dialogicality, situationality, individuality, and expressiveness while they “only seem incoherent (Boniecka, 1999, 35). If we assume that “colloquial text is cognitive” (*ibid.*, 40), then we can admit that on the basis of utterances by children with Down syndrome we check their knowledge of the fragment of reality concerning emotions.

In some cases (conversations about *fear* and about *joy*) the utterances took the form of reports on the knowledge of for example the fairy stories watched, e.g.

Would you like to watch “Beauty and the Beast” with me? You’ve seen it? Aha! You know, the prince was a beast. He transformed [into the beast]. His fortune was lost. The girl is beautiful. Snow. The horse returned alone. The father did not.

And Cinderella likes the ball. Do you know this fairy story?

Answer: Yes.

Good. The palace, the coach. The sisters were mean and bad. The prince fell in love with Cinderella. And he looked for the girl, looked until he found her. And there was the wedding. The wedding was beautiful. And they loved each other.

The foregoing utterances have reporting character. Nevertheless, the questions addressed to the interlocutor: *You’ve seen it? Do you know this fairy story?* refer to their shared knowledge. We can also surmise that they have taken the form of ellipsis. The process of the increasing of knowledge and leveling it might continue if there were questions and requests for explanation on the part of the adult taking part in the dialogue.

On the other hand, the children may not have remembered the exact course of events in the fairy stories in question. This may be directly related to the explicit memory – the system of recalling, thought-out and connected with intellectual effort as opposed to the implicit memory – the unintentional and automatic way of remembering and recalling. Studies have shown that the first type of memory is definitely worse developed in children with Down syndrome than the latter is (Zasępa 2008, 160).

Speaking difficulties may also stem from the fact that the short-term memory develops far more slowly than the process of understanding the world, hence talking about the world that the children see and experience is difficult (Kaczmarek 2008, 109).

CONCLUSION

According to scholars studying the problem of oligophasia in speech therapy and psychology, moderately disabled children with Down syndrome are characterized by the impaired ability of abstract thinking, resulting in concretism of thin-

king; difficulties in perceiving and constructing cause-and-effect relationships; consequently, the outcome is the reporting character of utterances; weak imagination related to observations that are made slowly and inaccurately; and difficulties in constructing concrete concepts because of the inability to discern the essential features of objects and phenomena (cf. Michalik 2005, 172–173). As a consequence of the abovementioned deficits, children with Down syndrome encounter problems when organizing their knowledge concerning the fragments of reality which are emotions. First of all, because their thinking is different and specific in many respects compared to the thinking of normally developing children.

Bearing the foregoing problems in mind, it should nevertheless be remembered that “only language will also permit” mentally handicapped children, including those with Down syndrome, “to get to know and get acquainted with the world” (Cieszyńska 2005, 99). “To speak is to create oneself as the subject. In other words, speech serves not only to communicate but it also constitutes the subject by revealing his/her own existence” (*ibid*, 99). The delay in the child’s development should be the signal to take therapeutic and stimulation measures aimed at leveling or compensating for developmental deficits (cf. Piotrowicz 2014, 23). It should be remembered on this occasion that the first six years of life is the most important period in the child’s development, which determines the whole subsequent process of learning (*ibid*, 27).

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