Local Meaning in the Two-year-old and Three-year-old Children's Speech

Vietas nozīme divgadīgu un trīsgadīgu bērnu runā

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The aim of this article is analyze the ways how the local meaning has been expressed in the children's (aged 18 to 42 months) speech. What grammatical categories are often used? The speech data from the first Morfoloģiski marķēts longitudināls bērnu runas korpusss (Annotated Longitudinal Latvian Children’s Speech Corpus) are used. The corpus is created during the research project Latvian Language in Monolingual and Bilingual Acquisition: tools, theories and applications and includes orthographically and morphologically annotated audio recordings of 17 to 44 months old children’s speech. It was concluded that for the expression of local meanings the adverbs, locative case, prepositional phrases and prefixal verbs are often-used, but all these forms do not appear in the children’s speech simultaneously.

Keywords: children's speech corpus, language acquisition, local meaning

The Language acquisition takes place individually and is associated to the overall development of each child. General observations show that by the age of 18 months a child usually has a vocabulary of 50 to 150 words. After that age a steady expansion of vocabulary can be observed. At the third year of life more attention is paid to the acquisition of grammar and syntax. Two-word sentences are used with increasing frequency and they express definite meaning: an Actor performs an Action (1); an Action affects an Object (2); an Object is given a Location (3); an Object or Person is Described (4). (Crystal 1997, 244–245)

(1) tētīs apgāzās
dad.NOM.SG fell-over.PST.3
‘dad fell over’
The article explores the expression of the local meaning in a two-year-old and three-year-old children's speech. What grammatical categories are often used? When the children in their speech start to use adverbials?

As it is known, adverbial is a syntactic element whose role is one served by adverbs (Matthews 2007, 10) – the part of speech that modifies a verb, an adjective, another adverb, or an entire clause or sentence. Adverbials most commonly take the form of adverbs, noun phrases or prepositional phrases (Lokmane 2013, 765).

Local adverbial meaning – adverbial and prefixal verbs expressing goal/direction of the motion, or one expressing the place of existence/appearance.

**Analyzed Data (Annotated Longitudinal Children’s Speech Corpus)**

Analyzed data of three monolingual children (Latvian speaking) and one bilingual (Latvian and Russian speaking) child is taken from the first *Morfoloģiski marķēts longitudināls bērnu runas korpus* (Annotated Longitudinal Latvian Children’s Speech Corpus). (Auzina et al. 2016) The corpus is a part of the project *Latvian Language in Monolingual and Bilingual Acquisition: tools, theories and applications* that represents a systematic and comprehensive investigation of monolingual and bilingual acquisition of the Latvian language, unprecedented in theoretical and empirical scope.

The corpus contains 4 longitudinal child’s speech sub-corpora:
- 3 monolingual Latvian-speaking children sub-corpora;
- 1 Latvian-Russian bilingual child sub-corpus.
The recordings were made in a period of 18 months from April 2015 to September 2016. The corpus contains recorded samples of children’s language over one and a half year period. The speech of youngest monolingual girl (Monolingual girl_1) is being recorded from 17 months to 31 months of age. The speech of oldest monolingual girl (Monolingual girl_2) is being recorded from 27 months to 42 months of age. The speech of monolingual boy is being recorded from 18 months to 32 months of age. A bilingual boy’s speech data were recorded from 28 to 42 months of age. See figure 1.

Children were recorded at their home or other familiar environment interacting with their family (most often their mother). During this time, four recording sessions per month have been conducted at regular intervals. Unfortunately, for various objective reasons the records have not been conducted with so much regularity, as it was originally planned. The largest break in the recording of one respondent is nine weeks.

The corpus size has been reached 134 hours of child-directed and child-adult speech recordings that are partly orthographically annotated.

![Figure 1: The age of the children in the months: from the beginning of recordings](image)

**Figure 1:** The age of the children in the months: from the beginning of recordings

**Age of children and language development in this age group**

As acknowledged by Crystal (1997, 244–245), the 18 months is the end of so
called ‘one-word stage’ of language development when children already move on to relating objects with other things, places and people and objects with events, e.g. *Tētis te* ‘Daddy here’. At the age of 17–19 month the first language specific constraints on word order and structure are evident, although an utterance length is constrained. The length constraint of utterances gradually releases as words begin to be combined into sentences. (Lust 2006, 280)

Between two and three years of age, children begin constructing some more abstract constructions with fewer particular items necessary (Tomasello 2009, 78). The syntax become more complex and morphosyntax continues to grow (Lust 2006, 280).

During the pre-operational stage, lasting from 2 to 7 years of age, children learn the language and its expression is closely associated with the development of the thinking process and intellectual development in general, and it is reflected in the child's speech. During this stage children are able to think about things symbolically. This is the ability to make one thing – a word or an object – stand for something other than itself. (Piaget 1952)

Already in the preverbal stage of the language development children can communicate and express their emotions very well with facial expressions, gestures, voice responses, sounds. (Piaget 1952)

The children already use so-called „jargon intonation” – intonation patterns (one or more intonation contours) before they produced their first words, in pre-linguistic utterances (Peters 1977). Our data shows that sometimes 17–18 month-old children produce sound clusters, not real words (for example, *mm, nimņi*) to indicate location or direction. The first words are expressed around the age of twelve months and that marks a new stage in the development of language, so-called “one-word stage”.

During the second year of life, language development of toddler does proceed at very different rates in different children. Crystal (1997, 247) believes that by age two, spoken vocabulary probably exceeds 200 words, but in the third year of life the rapid acquisition of new words starts. Child's first words are universal: names of food, animals, family members, toys, vehicles, and clothing. Usually children first learn general nouns, such as “tree” instead of “oak”, and they may over generalize words,
such as calling all toys “dolls”. At this age children attempt to pronounce multisyllabic words, speak two- or three-word sentences, ask two- or three-word sentences, they hum and sing, express pain verbally etc. They learn to use pronouns, some grammatical forms, such as past and future tense, noun accusative, genitive, dative case etc. They use three to five-word sentences; acquire the ability to repeat rhymes, songs, and stories, to answer special and general questions. (Lust 2006, 280)

On the basis of the corpus data in Latvian at this age the child more commonly uses utterances with incomplete structure (usually, one word utterances (Lust 2006, 280), for example, mamma, mam ‘mother’, baba ‘grandmother’, dod ‘give (me)’, nē, yea ‘no’), sometimes utterances with two or three components are used.

Results

To express local meaning the adverbs, locative case, prepositional phrases and prefixal verbs are used, but these forms do not appear in the language simultaneously.

There are some forms that emerge first: these are forms which indicate either static location (locative, adverbs) or movement towards a location (preposition + nouns in accusative, dative or genitive). The forms with the meaning „motion away” appear noticeably later, thus there is a lack of data about movement away.

Our observations show that in the age of two years the adverbs of place are used to express local meaning, for example, tur ‘there’, te ‘here’, kur ‘where’, etc.

Just afterwards the emergence of inflected nouns (for example, istabā ‘in the room’) and prepositions (for example, uz galda ‘on the table’) indicates both the child’s developing ability to productively form new words and word forms and the increasing need to verbally encode location more explicitly. Just after some time adverbs like ārā ‘outside’, lejā 'down' have been produced by children.

<table>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<td>Adverbs (static loc.)</td>
<td>2;1</td>
<td>te ‘here’, tur ‘there’</td>
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<td>Locative (static loc.)</td>
<td>2;6</td>
<td>ielikšu iatiņos [ratiņos] put-in.FUT.1SG dolls’ pram.ACC.PL ‘I will put in the dolls’ pram’</td>
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### Adverbs

To express the local meaning some adverbs are used in the children’s speech. Local adverbs are widely used starting from 2;1.

Most of the adverbs used by child at this age are non-interrogative adverbs. Just interrogative adverb *kurp* ‘where’ has been used several times.

Most often adverbs *te* ‘here’ and *tur* ‘there’ are used. The reference point of these adverbs can be speaker or the hearer, in which case they are deictic, i.e., their meaning depends on the extralinguistic context (who the speaker/hearer is, where they stand). Moreover, these adverbs contain other semantic features than that of local distance from participants of the speech act. (Haase 2001, 761)

The adverbs *te* ‘here’ and *tur* ‘there’ appear in the children’s speech when they are about two years old. These adverbs mainly are deictic, i.e. their main function is to refer to a place near (here) or away (there) from the speaker (Haase 2001, 761), for example,

(5) Child (2;3): \[ \text{tas} \quad \text{būs} \quad \text{te} \]
\[ \text{it.NOM.SG} \quad \text{be.FUT.3} \quad \text{here} \]
‘it will be here’

(6) Child (2;6): \[ \text{es} \quad \text{te} \quad \text{džīvošu} \quad \text{pati} \]
In some examples adverb tur ‘there’ is used as discourse marker, namely, it does not indicate the location or direction, for example,

(7) Child (2;3):  
    te nav here be.PRS.3.NEG  
    ‘here is no’

Adverbs iekšā ‘inside’, augšā ‘upstairs’, pāri ‘over’ are frequently used, for example,

(10) Child (2;6):  
    šito liksim iekšā this.ACC.SG put.FUT.1PL inside.LOC.SG  
    ‘we will put this inside’

Adverbs citur ‘somewhere else’, kaut kur ‘somewhere’, nekur ‘nowhere’:

(13) Child (2;1):  
    i [ir] kau [kaut] kul [kur] aizbēdzis be.PRS.3 somewhere-ADV escape.PST.PRF.3  
    pojam [projām] no tevis away-ADV from you.GEN.SG  
    ‘it is somewhere escape from you’
I. Nom.SG you.Acc.SG nowhere-ADV
neledzēju [neredzēju]
see.Pst.1sg.neg
‘I did not see you anywhere’

**Locative**

Important role of the locative is in relating a referent to some point or location in space (Matthews 2007, 231). Locative is one of early abstract construction in children speech (Tomassello 2009, 78). For example, in response to the special question of the interlocutor, the child uses the exact word form in the locative (15–16, 20) or uses prefixal verb and noun in locative (17–19).

(15) Mother: 
kur 

tad 

ir?

where-ADV then-PTCL be.PRS.3

‘where then?’

Child (1;10): 

jūrā 

see.LOC.SG

‘in the sea’

(16) Mother: 
kur 

tad 

tādu 

var

where-ADV then-PTCL that.Acc.SG can.PRS.3
dabūt?

get.INF

‘where can you get that?’

Child (1;10): 

operātā [aparātā]

apparatus.LOC.SG

‘in the apparatus’

(17) Child (2;1): 

tā 

jāja 

un 

beigās 

tas

it.Nom.SG.F ride.PST.3 and end.LOC.PL it.Nom.SG.M

nogāzās 

tā

zemē

fall_down.PST.3 so-ADV ground.LOC.SG

‘so it rode and in the end it fell down’

(18) Child (2;6): 

ielikšu 

latiņos [ratiņos]

put-in.Fut.1sg dolls’ pram.Acc.PL
‘I will put in the dolls’ pram’

(19) Child (2;6): ielikšu tejā [tajā] somā visas
put-in.FUT.SG.1 that.LOC.SG bag.LOC.SG all.ACC.PL
puzzles
puzzle.ACC.PL
‘I will put all puzzles in that bag’

(20) Child (2;6): otlā [otrā] pusīē
other.ACC.SG side.ACC.SG
‘on the other side’

Prepositional phrases

As written by Rūķe-Draviņa (1993, 49) preposition learning could be observed
in three stages:

1. The child does not use prepositions, nor correct inflectional endings. Only the
word order and context allow to understand what the child wants to say.

2. The child does not use preposition, but the substantive is used in relevant case
(Rūķe-Draviņa 1993, 48). During the transition period, when the child begins to use
the prepositions, fluctuations are observed. The child says the first sentence with a
preposition and then repeats the same phrase without prepositions.

3. In the next stage of language development preposition are used with a noun in
appropriate case.

In observation of Rūķe-Draviņa the usage of the preposition begins only at three
years of age. Our data shows that already at age of two year children use prepositions
with correct case to express the meaning of place.

The first prepositions that appear in children’s speech are uz ‘to’, pie ‘at’, no
‘from’.

Prepositional forms without prepositions

Usually prepositions have not been omitted. However, there are some rare
examples when prepositional phrases have been used without preposition (21) or
instead of prepositional phrase the locative has been used (22) in the children’s
speech. For example:

(21) Child (2;5): plīst glīdas [uz grīdas]
burst.PRS.3 floor.GEN.SG
‘burst onto the floor’

(22) Child (2;3): brauc darbiņā [uz darbiņu]
drive.PRS.3 work.LOC.SG
‘drive to work’

Preposition *uz* ‘to’ are used to express movement towards (24, 25), prepositions *pie* ‘at’ (23, 26 and 27), *no* ‘from’ – static movement (28).

(23) Child (2;6): es pie tētīša iešu
I.NOM.SG to dad.GEN.SG go.FUT.1SG
‘I will go to dad’

(24) Child (2;3): es neiešu uz dāzu [dārzu]
I.NOM.SG go.FUT.1SG.NEG to kindergarten.ACC.SG
I’m not going to kindergarten’

(25) Child (2;3): viņš lac [lec] uz glīda [grīdas]
he.NOM.SG jump.PRS.3 on floor.NOM
‘he jumps on the floor’

(26) Child (2;1): pie tā loga nosala
at that.GEN.SG window.GEN.SG frozen.PST.3
that.NOM.SG hand.NOM.SG
‘this hand was frozen at that window’

(27) Mother: kur tas ir?
where-ADV it.NOM.SG be.PRS.3
‘where is it?’

Child (2;1): pie kakla
at neck.GEN.SG
‘at the neck’

(28) Child (2;3): tālu no mājas (atkārto mammas teikto)
far-ADV from home.GEN.SG
‘far away from home’ (repeats what mother said).

**Prefixal verbs**

pre prefix
Around the age of two the children begin to use prefixal verbs in different syntactic environment (29):

(29) Child (3;2): 
\[
\begin{align*}
ai & \text{ es } nolecu \\
oh & \text{ I.NOM.SG } \text{jump-down.PST.2SG} \\
'\text{Oh, I jumped down'}
\end{align*}
\]

Prefixal verb frequently is used together with adverb (30–32) or with prepositional phrase (33) expressing the same movement meaning:

(30) Child (3;6): 
\[
\begin{align*}
tavu & \text{ krūzi } ielikšu \text{ iekšā} \\
your & \text{ cup.ACC.SG put-in.FUT.1SG inside.LOC} \\
'I \text{ will put your tea cup inside.}'
\end{align*}
\]

(31) Child (2;3): 
\[
\begin{align*}
Lauma & \text{ novilks } \text{ zeķes } \text{ nost} \\
Lauma.NOM.SG & \text{ put-off.3FUT sock.ACC.PL off-ADV} \\
'\text{Lauma will put off the socks.}'
\end{align*}
\]

(32) Child (3;0): 
\[
\begin{align*}
pele & \text{ jau } izbēga \text{ no} \\
\text{mouse.NOM.SG already-ADV get-off.PST.3 from} \\
tovelā [tovera] & \text{ālā [ārā]} \\
tub.GEN.SG & \text{outside.LOC.SG} \\
'the mouse already escaped from the tub'
\end{align*}
\]

(33) Child (3;0): 
\[
\begin{align*}
no & \text{ priksta [pirksta] nolipa} \\
\text{from finger.GEN.PL take-off.PRS.3} \\
'took off from the finger'
\end{align*}
\]

It would be interesting to investigate in what way the prefixal verbs are combined with adverbs, locative and prepositional constructions to express the local meaning.

**Conclusions**

There are some forms that emerge first (around two years of age: 1;10–2;1) and that indicate either static location (locative, adverbs) or movement towards a location (preposition + nouns in accusative, dative or genitive).

Prepositional phrases are used quite accurately – with the correct ending and with the preposition. Just some rare examples show that prepositions might be omitted
from the prepositional phrases.

Locative is mainly used to express the local meaning, but not meaning of time.

Around the age of two the children begin to use prefixal verbs in their speech, but the lack of examples does not allow us to draw general conclusions.

Acknowledgements

The research project “Latvian Language in Monolingual and Bilingual Acquisition: tools, theories and applications” leading to these results has received funding from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 under Project Contract No NFI/R/2014/053.

Sources

Annotated Longitudinal Children's Speech Corpus (lamba.korpuss.lv).

Abbreviations

1 1st person
2 2nd person
3 3rd person
ACC accusative
ADV adverb
GEN genitive
F feminine
FUT future
IMP imperfect
INF infinitive
LOC locative
M masculine
NEG negative
NOM nominative
PRF perfect
PL plural
PRS present
PST past
PTCL particle
SG singular

References


**Kopsavilkums**

Vispirms aprakstīts, kā kopumā šajā posmā attīstās bērnu runa – cik plašs ir vārdu krājums, kāda nozīme ir intonācijai, kādas gramatiskās kategorijas tiek lietotas vispirms u. tml. Tālāk analizēts, kādā vecumā parādās kādi vietas izteikšanas līdzekļi, kā tie tiek savstarpeji kombinēti, kādas ir atkāpes no normas, kādā sintaktiskajā apkaimē un cik patstāvīgi tie tiek lietoti. Sākot no diviem gadiem, tiek lietoti vispārīgās nozīmes adverbi (te, tur), vēlāk tiek izmantoti arī lietvārdi lokatīvā un prepozicionālas konstrukcijas. Kopumā līdzekļi vietas nozīmes izteikšanai tiek izvēlēti samērā precīzi, arī prepozicionālās konstrukcijās tiek izmantoti atbilstošie prievārdi un nomenu locījumi.

Raksts pieņemts publicēšanai rakstu krājumā "Valoda: Nozīme un forma, 8". Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte.