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Development of verbal expression in pre-school children

ABSTRACT: Efforts to develop verbal expression in children should take into account the multifaceted dimension and complex character of linguistic abilities. The article presents the results of studies on developing the pre-school child's verbal expression with the use of thematic activities in working with children. The investigations used quantitative-qualitative methods, taking into account the frequency and increase in vocabulary, length of utterance (number of words), and the number and average of words in a sentence-utterance.

KEYWORDS: child's speech development, verbal expression, learning through playing

Rozwijanie ekspresji werbalnej dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym

STRESZCZENIE: W dążeniach do rozwijania ekspresji werbalnej dzieci powinno się uwzględnić wieloaspektowy wymiar i złożony charakter zdolności językowych. W artykule zostały przedstawione wyniki badań nad rozwijaniem ekspresji werbalnej dziecka w wieku przedszkolnym pod wpływem wykorzystania tematycznych zabaw w pracy z dziećmi. W badaniach zastosowano metody ilościowo-jakościowe, uwzględniając frekwencję i przyrost słownictwa, długość wypowiedzi (liczbę słów), liczbę i średnią słów w wypowiedzeniu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: rozwój mowy dziecka, ekspresja werbalna, uczenie poprzez zabawę

Significant for the process of developing speech and language is to see the importance of the matter of communication that embraces gestures, facial expression, pictures and all kinds of objects. The mastering of language is the highest level in the evolving process of communication, desired on all accounts because reserved for man only. The development of speech and language will take place if all channels of communication are effectively included in therapeutic management because it is from them that cognition or naming starts. Scholars investigating the theory of the mind assume that mental states are interconnected (perception involves knowledge), linked with events in the world as well as with the actions of one's own and actions of other people (Bokus & Shugar, 2007). The point is to

take into account the conception that language is rooted in general knowledge. Communicative competence as the starting point entails observation of the acquisition of linguistic competence by children.

Efforts to develop children's verbal expression should take account of the multifaceted dimension and complex character of linguistic abilities. The search for the method of working with the child of preschool age should involve the therapeutic management that will develop the child's joy and pleasure from being able to verbally communicate with the world.

Out of the factors indispensable for the child's general development and speech plus language development, worthy of special note is both reading to her/him books, fairy tales, and stories including the discussion of their content, and also learning through play. What turns out to be most valuable in the course of reading and play is the uniting of the world of children with that of adults. The opportunity for the child and his/her adult minder to jointly participate in determining the course of play, in retelling the text read, in discussing the sequence of events in the part of the fairy tale being read or of a game, stimulates and develops the child's linguistic competence and communicative skills (Brzezińska, Czuba, Lutomski & Smykowski, 1995).

The paper is going to present the results of investigations on developing the preschool-age child's verbal expression resulting from the use of thematic activities in working with children. The investigation used quantitative-qualitative methods, taking into account the frequency and increase in vocabulary, length of utterance (number of words), and the number and average of words in a sentence-utterance, and attention was paid to the suprasegmental signals present in children's utterances.

The goal of the analysis is to present the efficacy of the educating effect of play/games on the development of verbal expression in children of preschool age (Kwiatkowska, 1985, p. 367; Żebrowska, 1986, p. 454; Przetacznik-Gierowska, Makiełło-Jarża, 1989, p. 142). The favorite plays/games of preschoolers embrace construction games consisting in the child making diverse objects from different materials, i.e. building, molding, doing DIY, with the use of sand, blocks, sticks, cones, boxes, paper, etc. During construction and creative games children often monologize, telling aloud what they are doing. At the same time, during these activities they improve the ability to think independently. While playing, children become verbally active under the influence of pleasant emotions, curiosity and personal involvement: consequently, they activate mental functions related to impressions, observations, top-down attention. A preschool-age child does not yet have a complete ability to perform different mental "operations" such as comparison, analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalization, reasoning and expressing judgments. S/he learns to think only under the influence of diverse activities that provide rich sensations and experiences during contact with social life, nature and technology, and owing to the conscious and intentional work of preschool teachers.

The investigations assumed that the independent variable was the introduction of educational games/activities in order to develop the verbal expression of the five-year-old child, whereas the dependent variable was a substantial increase in the child's active vocabulary, both in terms of parts of speech and improvement of the ability to verbalize thoughts in the form of syntactic wholes (an increase in the number of simple and compound sentences in children's utterances).

The studies presented in the article were conducted in January and February 2020 in a group of fifteen five-year-old children (six girls and nine boys) who went to the kindergarten in one of the towns in the Silesia province. All children have complete families. Most families are in good financial situation (i.e. working parents). The housing conditions of the studied families are also satisfactory. The number of children is usually small, with the prevalence of two-child families. In two cases the children do not have siblings. The majority of parents in the studied group have secondary education, fewer of them – vocational education, and in one case, only the mother has higher education. Most children have gone to the kindergarten for three years.

The experiment aimed to develop the verbal expression of five-year-old children involved carrying out educational activities that would demonstrate the acquisition of the abilities to: speak about a picture, describe elements in the pictures, answer questions, understand the content of verbal riddles, and to produce correct syntactic utterances using rich vocabulary. The activities were conducted as part of classes for children during five weeks in accordance with the presented research assumptions. The investigations were divided into three stages. Stage I and III required an individual meeting with the child. Stage II took place in the room for six-year-olds and involved the whole studied group. In the stage I the preschoolers were asked to comment on the picture they were shown¹. Stage II consisted in the introduction of the independent variable. The variable in the study was educational games and activities aimed to develop the five-year-old child's verbal expression. Stage III resembled the first stage. The subject was asked to speak about the picture s/he saw during the first meeting.

The investigation procedure was similar in stage I and III. After greeting the respondent and instructing him/her about the objective of the investigation, the researcher asked him/her to speak on the presented picture. Stage II consisted in carrying out educational games/activities with the whole group of the studied children as part of everyday classes.

¹ In this research each person received a colour printed situational picture "Country animals". The signal for starting a story was the instruction: "Tell me what is going on in this picture. Have a closer look and tell me about it". The researcher was sitting in front of the child and was not looking at the picture in question.

In all stages there were no major procedural problems. During stage I and III of the carrying out of investigations there were no time limits, each respondent answered at his/her own pace. All subjects were interested in the investigation, willingly performed activities and obeyed the instructions of the researcher. During the investigation in stage III the children showed a lot of engagement, were cheerful and pleased; great commitment was visible as was the willingness to actively participate in the conducted activities.

During all the activities the children's attention was drawn to improving the skill of speaking in a complete sentence. The children's utterances were recorded. Their parents gave a written consent to the children's participation in the investigations.

Initially, the children answered the question: *Tell me what you see in this picture* [*Powiedz, co widzisz na tym obrazku*] with one noun, with short simple sentences. They also used sentence equivalents. Only sometimes they answered with a sentence defining the simplest actions of the presented persons, e.g. *a rooster is standing on the fence* [*kogut stoi na płocie*.]

TABLE 1. Results of examinations of the child's active vocabulary before the introduction of the independent variable

No.	Child's name	Parts of speech				Simple sentence	Compound sentences	Number of words
		noun	numerals	adjectives	verbs			
1	Ada	15	–	1	9	1	–	25
2	Beata	26	2	1	11	3	1	40
3	Darek	18	1	2	10	8	1	31
4	Jan	14	–	1	2	2	–	17
5	Julek	10	–	–	4	1	–	14
6	Karol	12	–	1	5	1	–	18
7	Kasia	24	1	–	10	12	1	35
8	Krzyś	22	–	6	11	10	–	39
9	Magda	16	–	2	7	1	–	25
10	Marek	23	1	–	7	4	1	31
11	Marta	11	–	1	4	1	–	16
12	Piotr	14	–	1	8	1	–	23
13	Paweł	16	–	1	10	10	–	27
14	Patryk	9	–	–	3	–	–	12
15	Zosia	21	1	2	5	7	–	29
Total		251	6	19	106	62	4	382

SOURCE: Own study.

Before the research program was introduced, the children used first of all nouns and verbs in their utterances, in which there was a negligible percentage of adjectives and numerals (chart 1).

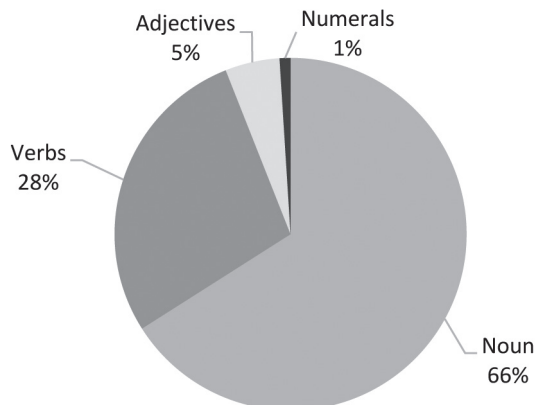


CHART 1. The result of the examination of the active vocabulary of five-year-old children before the introduction of the independent variable – parts of speech

SOURCE: Own study.

Children predominantly used simple sentences and sentence equivalents. Compound sentences almost never occurred in communication with the environment (chart 2).

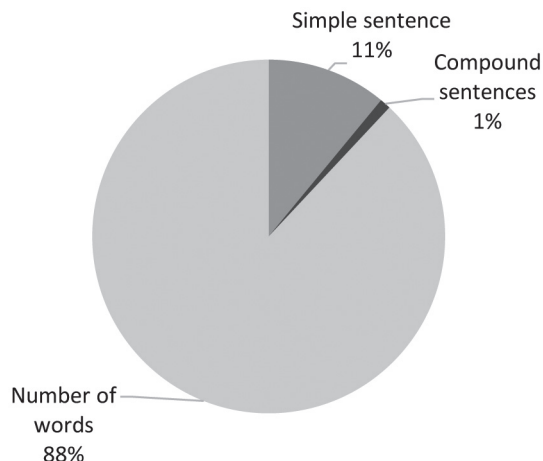


CHART 2. The result of the examination of the active vocabulary of five-year-old children before the introduction of the independent variable – sentences

SOURCE: Own study.

When discussing the picture, the children based their utterance first of all on observation, while their ideas played a lesser role, which caused the children to mainly list the objects and facts presented in the illustration.

Most of the subjects gestured with a hand or pointed with the head at what they saw in the picture, what they were talking about at the moment.

In the children, symptoms of lack of speech fluency were observed which were expressed in interpolations (*hm, ee, yy*), stumbling, or in the wrong use of pauses.

In the utterances a large number of diminutive nouns was reported, e.g. *kurka* [small hen], *owieczka* [little sheep/lamb] etc. The children generally did not make errors in conjugating verbs.

After the independent variable was introduced, which was educational games (rhythm-motor and arts activities combined with: speaking about a picture; describing elements in pictures; answering questions; guessing the content of verbal riddles), the manner of speaking by the respondents largely changed. The children tried to present the picture in the form of a short story. The narratives usually consisted of several correctly constructed sentences containing different parts of speech, not only nouns and verbs but also adjectives, pronouns and conjunctions (table 2).

It follows from the investigations that the children used mostly nouns, but also used quite a lot of verbs and adjectives. They also began to use numerals, pronouns and conjunctions (chart 3).

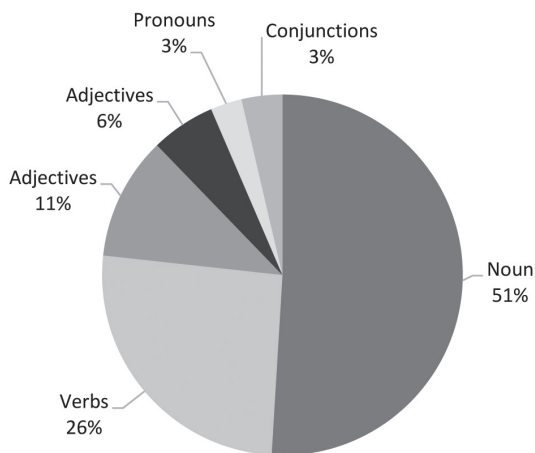


CHART 3. The result of the examination of the active vocabulary of five-year-old children after the introduction of the independent variable – parts of speech

SOURCE: Own study.

TABLE 2. Results of examinations of the child's active vocabulary after the introduction of the independent variable

No.	Child's name	Parts of speech							Simple sentence	Compound sentences	Number of words
		noun	verbs	adjectives	numerals	pronouns	conjunctions				
1	Ada	41	23	8	-	3	3	18	3	78	
2	Beata	32	14	6	3	2	3	10	2	60	
3	Darek	38	14	15	5	4	3	5	9	79	
4	Jan	21	8	4	4	2	2	7	-	41	
5	Julek	17	11	1	-	-	1	7	1	30	
6	Karol	15	7	5	1	-	2	7	-	30	
7	Kasia	42	19	7	3	1	3	17	2	75	
8	Krzyś	28	17	7	11	2	1	13	2	66	
9	Magda	29	17	6	5	3	2	13	3	62	
10	Marek	36	23	10	4	1	3	22	1	77	
11	Marta	27	13	4	-	2	1	14	-	47	
12	Piotr	26	12	8	4	1	2	15	-	53	
13	Paweł	23	13	-	2	2	1	7	1	41	
14	Patryk	26	8	4	-	2	2	9	1	42	
15	Zosia	32	20	9	7	2	2	12	5	72	
	Total	433	219	94	49	24	31	176	30	853	

SOURCE: Own study.

What is important – almost all children began to construct simple sentences. The number of compound sentences also increased in the children’s utterances (chart 4).

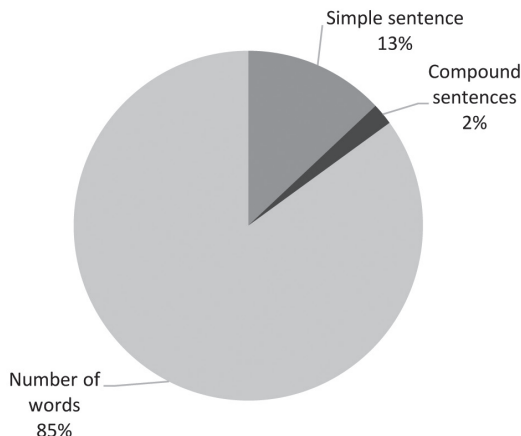


CHART 4. The result of the examination of the active vocabulary of five-year-old children after the introduction of the independent variable – sentences

SOURCE: Own study.

The numerical data on the frequency of parts of speech, obtained from the investigations, show that an increase in the number of words was more than 200%. The analysis of the children’s utterances before the introduction of educational games/activities and after their implementation demonstrates that the verbal expression of the respondents evolved (table 3).

After the activities had been conducted in the group of the five-year-old children, there was a clear development of the verbal expression of the respondents. The children learned first of all more adjectives and verbs. They started to use both numerals and adverbs, nouns, and conjunctions. What is essential, not only the children’s active vocabulary was enriched but their way of speaking changed. Most of the children began to use simple and compound sentences in addition to sentence equivalents. The children made use of the acquired knowledge related to the content of the picture and in their utterances they reproduced relationships between the elements. It can thus be seen that both quantitative and qualitative changes took place: the development of logically connected speech, which occurred as a result of combining the child’s activity with teaching him/her new phrases and words.

TABLE 3. The results of examinations of the active vocabulary of children before and after the effect of the independent variable

No.	Child's name	Parts of speech												Simple sentence		Compound sentences		Number of words	
		noun		verbs		adjectives		numerals		pronouns		conjunctions		*	**	*	**	*	**
		*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**						
1	Ada	15	41	9	23	-	8	-	-	-	3	-	3	1	18	-	3	25	78
2	Beata	26	32	11	14	1	6	2	3	-	2	-	3	3	10	1	2	40	60
3	Darek	18	38	10	14	2	15	1	5	-	4	-	3	8	5	1	9	31	79
4	Jan	14	21	2	8	1	4	-	4	-	2	-	2	2	7	-	-	17	41
5	Julek	10	17	4	11	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	7	-	1	14	30
6	Karol	12	15	5	7	1	5	-	1	-	-	-	2	1	7	-	-	18	30
7	Kasia	24	42	10	19	-	7	1	3	-	1	-	3	12	17	1	2	35	75
8	Krzyś	22	28	11	17	6	7	-	11	-	2	-	1	10	13	-	2	39	66
9	Magda	16	29	7	17	-	6	-	5	-	3	-	2	1	13	-	3	25	62
10	Marek	23	36	7	23	-	10	1	4	-	1	-	3	4	22	1	1	31	77
11	Marta	11	27	4	13	1	4	-	-	-	2	-	1	1	14	-	-	16	47
12	Piotr	14	26	8	12	1	8	-	4	-	1	-	2	1	15	-	-	23	53
13	Paweł	16	23	10	13	1	-	-	2	-	2	-	1	10	7	-	1	27	41
14	Patryk	9	26	3	8	-	4	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	9	-	1	12	42
15	Zosia	21	32	5	20	2	9	1	7	-	2	-	2	7	12	-	5	29	72
Total		251	433	106	219	16	94	6	49	-	24	-	31	62	176	4	30	382	853

* Results before the effect of the independent variable.

** Results after the effect of the independent variable.

SOURCE: Own study.

The conducted procedure contributed to developing verbal expression in pre-school-age children through:

- the direct linking of new words and concepts during activities with their corresponding objects or actions;
- independent action by the child, which exerts a considerable influence on his/her utterances;
- participation in the community of communicating persons and the possibility of observing the actions of both the adults and the children's peers.

The foundation of the development of the child's verbal expression is many-sided training (learning) that integrates expository methods (acquisition), problem methods (discovering), activation methods (experiencing) and practical ones (action). The methods of language teaching are those that are conducive to seeking, to independently discovering and linking with one's own experiences as well as analyzing them to be used in practice (Hemerling, 1990, p. 15).

A special role in stimulating the child's verbal expression is played by the elements of educational methods that trigger emotional experiences. The manifestation of the strong emotional stimulation of the child's linguistic sphere is appropriate forms of verbal expression relating to the analyzed text as well as illustrations, image, or specific fact or event. In the conditions of strong emotional excitation, cognitive interest increases and the desire grows to express that which has triggered emotions. In such situations it is easier to teach the right choice of words, use of grammatical forms and orthophonic rules as well as to formulate comprehensible utterances (Wengiera, 1984, p. 34).

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