Psychology of Language and Communication

Volume 3 Number 1 1999

Articles

Henriëtte Hendriks
Introduction 3

Ottavia Albanese
Children's story comprehension and teacher's story-telling 7

Hanna Jakubowicz Batoréo
Children's discourse in European Portuguese narratives 19

Otilia da Costa e Sousa
Constructing reference in children's narratives 29

Henriëtte Hendriks
The acquisition of temporal reference in first and second language acquisition: what children already know and adults still have to learn and vice versa 41

Natela Imedadze, Lia Shartava
Motion verbs in Georgian children's narratives 61

Iwona Kowal
What do false starts and self-repairs tell us about narrative structure? 75

Aylin C. Küntay
How do Turkish preschoolers anchor referents in conversational extended discourse? 83

Short Communications

Hristo Kyuchukov
Analyzing speech errors of minority children acquiring Bulgarian as a second language 93

Book review: Jeroen Aarssen, Relating events in two languages. Acquisition of cohesive devices by Turkish-Dutch bilingual children at school age (by Hristo Kyuchukov) 99
SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

HRISTO KYUCHUKOV
Open Society Institute, Budapest

ANALYZING SPEECH ERRORS OF MINORITY CHILDREN ACQUIRING BULGARIAN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The article focuses on the speech errors of two groups of minority children - Turkish and Gypsy (Roma) living in Bulgaria and learning Bulgarian as their second language (L2). The oral speech of these children is analyzed and the errors in their L2 on different levels (phonological, morphological and syntactical) are classified. Different factors are identified explaining the reasons for errors - age factors, interindividual and intergenerational.

Introduction

A brief sociolinguistic outlook

The two major minority groups in Bulgaria are the Turks and the Roma, each numbering approximately a million, which is a substantial proportion of Bulgaria's population (currently 8.5 million). While the only official language is Bulgarian, a number of dialects of Turkish and Romani are spoken at home by the members of the minority groups, which are thus acquired by the Turkish and Roma children as first language (L1), respectively. By the time they have reached the age of 6 or 7, these children have most often come into contact with Bulgarian, but the number of them that can be described as bilingual is as compared to the competence in Bulgarian of first grade Turkish and Roma children usually ranges from mediocre to nonexistent. So in practice they need to acquire Bulgarian as a second language (L2) in the classroom, which places them in a much more difficult situation as compared to Bulgarian children.

This fairly obvious problem was denied completely by Bulgaria's former regime in its assimilational policies. No studies whatsoever were made on the difficulties that minority children experience and absolutely no compensatory programs existe. Bulgarian children in an upperclass Sofia district and in some distant Turkish village were expected to follow...
the same syllabus – most often with the consequence of the minority children failing entirely. As for any use of their first language publicly, for example to ask a question, this could be punished severely.

Things have changed dramatically in Bulgaria over the past 7–8 years, also in this respect. The post-totalitarian governments and the minority communities themselves have taken measures to improve the situation described above. On the one hand, the status of the minority languages is rapidly mounting and first-language instruction programs have been started. On the other hand, special attention is devoted to the acquisition of Bulgarian by minority first-graders, both by teachers and applied linguists, with the aim of giving these children the best possible competence in the official language of the country, and thus a proper start in life.

Aim of the study

The present study, focusing on some recurrent speech errors of children from the two main minority groups learning Bulgarian, was done in this improving climate. The aim was to identify and to attempt to explain a number of classes of mistakes, which is a necessary step to their correction.

Important research in the field

Many authors, including Ellis (1985), stress the importance of a systematic collection and classification of speech errors, which unfortunately often is done in an ad hoc manner.

Corder (1974) has developed a procedure for error analysis, distinguishing the following five stages:

1. Selection of a corpus of language
2. Identification of errors in the corpus
3. Classification of the identified errors
4. Explanation of the psycholinguistic causes of the errors
5. Evaluation or error gravity ranking of the errors

A more recent attempt on elaborating a procedure for identification and classification of errors was made by Lenon (1991), while Taylor (1986) focused on principles for their interpretation and explanation.

Two major motivations for speech errors are discussed by most authors: transfer from L1 (Tomasello & Herron, 1989; Takashima, 1992) and overgeneralization (Eckman et al., 1988).

A standard approach is also to analyze the errors on different linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics (Del. 1990; Oostendorp & Kok, 1990).

Gathering the data for the analysis

The data for the analysis of the speech errors was gathered through the following procedure:

70 first-grade children from the region of Provadia in North-eastern Bulgaria, half with the local Romani dialect and half with the local Turkish dialect as first languages, were interviewed in a classroom at the pose short narratives about their were taped and subsequently tran

Identification and classification

The next step in the analysis was deviation from standard Bulgarian an error. However, since our main the minority children, we ignore due to use of the local (non-stand The remaining errors were cia sentence below will give exampl

A. Phonetic/phonological error

1. Prosthesis of a vowel
   *iskrilo instead of skrilo hide,
   *a vchela instead of vchera lye.

2. Epenthesis of a vowel
   *for *nata instead of femata k

3. Metathesis
   *te vrat instead of trevata /gra
   *pir instead of pri jaf /

4. Loss of a consonant
   *tichki instead of pichki (birds)

5. Substitution of a consonant
   *listsa instead of listsa /fla,
   *whe *a instead of vchera /yes

6. Combinations of the above ty
   - epenthesis + substitution
   *pl atem /k instead of panemii
   - substitution + metathesis
   *pju avar instead of pmdava

7. Improper palatalization
   *tu monada instead of limona

8. Stress on the wrong syllable
   *asa instead of oxa /wasp/
the minority children failing example to ask a question, this
the past 7–8 years, also in this
institutions themselves have
On the one hand, the status of
age instruction programs have
the acquisition of Bulgarian
ists, with the aim of giving
language of the country, and
of the children from the two
is improving climate. The aim
s of mistakes, which is a neces-
ance of a systematic collection
is done in an ad hoc manner.
alysis, distinguishing the follo-

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

interviewed in a classroom at the beginning of the school year. They were asked to com-
ose short narratives about their homes, the classroom, etc. in Bulgarian. The interviews
were taped and subsequently transcribed.

Identification and classification of the errors

The next step in the analysis was to identify and except all errors from the corpus. Any
deviation from standard Bulgarian (the official language) taught at school was considered
an error. However, since our main interest was directed towards errors that are typical for
the minority children, we ignored errors that can be classified as “slips of the tongue” or
due to use of the local (non-standard) Bulgarian dialect.
The remaining errors were classified according to standard linguistic criteria. The pre-
sentation below will give examples of each of the major error-types.

A. Phonetic/phonological errors

1. Prosthesis of a vowel
   /škilo/ instead of /skilo/ [hide, past, non-evidential, neuter/ 
   a vchela instead of vchera [yesterday]/

2. Epenthesis of a vowel
   fürə nata instead of /furnata/ [oven, def/

3. Metathesis
   te rvata instead of /trevata/ [grass, def/ 
   pír instead of /pir/ [fat/ 

4. Loss of a consonant
   tichki instead of /ptichki/ [birds/ 

5. Substitution of a consonant
   lisisa instead of /lisia/ [fox/ 
   vcheta instead of /vchesa/ [yesterday/ 

6. Combinations of the above types of errors
   - epenthesis + substitution
     /ptametk/ instead of /pametik/ [statue/ 
   - substitution + metathesis
     /pwdávar/ instead of /pudavat/ [sell, pres, pl/ 

7. Improper palatalization
   /tu monada/ instead of /limonada/ [lemonade/ 

8. Stress on the wrong syllable
   /ösa/ instead of /osu/ [wasp/
B. Morphological errors

1. Use of a suffix from the mother tongue
   glas tina /glaš/, Bulg. voice + tina Türk, possessive /
   djados /djad/, Bulg. grandfather + s, Rom. accusative /

2. Drop of the she particle in forming the future tense
   az sa skrija tam /I hide there / instead of
   az /I e se skrija tam

3. Improper use of reflexivity
   obikaljat a a /going round themselves/ instead of
   obikaljat /going round/

4. Wrong conjunction
   Zashtoto kak vali snijag ... /Because it snows.../ instead of
   Zashtoto kato vali snajg ... /...when it snows.../

5. Wrong preposition
   padna ogori meni /fell on top of me/ instead of
   padna varhi meni /fell over me /

6. Overgeneralization in forming a verb tense form
   hesheka (heshe - was, past, sing, -va, pl suffix) instead of
   bjaka

C. Syntactic errors

1. Literal translation
   nie sega sme esen /we now are fall/ instead of
   esen /it's fall/

2. Full forms of personal pronouns instead of clitics
   otidi neja da vzemesh /go and take HER/ instead of
   otidi da ja vzemesh

3. Wrong word order
   Kuma Lisa dodi ni da zemi ejchata instead of
   Kuma Lisa dojde da ni vreme jajcata
   /The Fox came to get our eggs/

4. Improper concord
   chasovnika /clock, masc/ izvanjalo /ring, neuter/

5. Improper use of the copula verb e
   za tjas e studeno e
   /for them is cold is/ instead of
   na tjas im e studeno

6. Incomplete sentences
   I posli lisicata goliqna
   /and then the fox big for

An attempt at explanation
A thorough explanation of the informants t
But even at this level of observations for the errors descr

Age-related factors
Some of the errors seem
where a consonant is subst
-dren at this early age still h
/sf (which is a palatal, trem

Interferential factors
For most of the classes c
L1 influences L2 in differ
eastern Bulgaria is heavily
features in common and the
mitted by both Turkish and

The most obvious L1 tra
me is in Bulgarian, where th
that such word forms are ir
words in the local dialects
spoken in Bulgaria).

Another group of interfe
sed above as age-related), 1
consonant clusters which ex
by adding a vowel, or throu
phonological transfer is ti

While the errors discuss
with literal translation, aff
lead to misunderstanding. 1
(kak) that is the most direct ti
this context. We have exam
ex. B.3, where a reflexive f
the particle peski) are espe
most obvious cause of literal
translated “word by word”:

Overgeneralization
A number of the errors ri
in the acquisition of Bulga
examples like A.6 where th
6. Incomplete sentences
   
   *f posti listicata goljama ezik*
   
   /and then the fox big tongue /

An attempt at explanation of the errors

A thorough explanation of speech errors requires a much more detailed analysis of the speech of the informants than the one performed on the minority children for this study. But even at this level of analysis some conclusions can be drawn about the possible motivations for the errors described in the previous section.

Age-related factors

Some of the errors seem to be independent of the influence of L1. The examples in A.5, where a consonant is substituted with another, can be attributed to the fact that the children at this early age still have problems with some articulatorily difficult phonemes like /tI/ (which is a palatal, tremulant in Bulgarian) and /ts/, an affricate.

Interferential factors

For most of the classes of errors, however, an interferential explanation, i.e. one where L1 influences L2 in different respects, is natural. The dialect of Romani spoken in Northeastern Bulgaria is heavily influenced by Turkish, so the two L1 languages have many features in common and the same type of (interferentially motivated) error could be committed by both Turkish and Roma children.

The most obvious L1 transfer errors, are "neologisms", where the lexical root morpheme is in Bulgarian, while the grammatical suffix is from L1. It is not however always clear that such word forms are inventions of the child, because there are many Bulgarian loan words in the local dialects (though not as many as in the Western dialect of Romani, spoken in Bulgaria).

Another group of interferential errors are phonological (opposed to the phonetic, discussed above as age-related). Both Turkish and the local dialect of Romani disallow initial consonant clusters which explains the errors in A.1 – A.4: either by dropping a consonant, or by adding a vowel, or through metathesis avoiding the consonant clusters. Another instance of phonological transfer is the palatalization in A.7: latinals are palatalized in Turkish.

While the errors discussed above concern mainly linguistic form, those that have to do with literal translation, affect directly the semantics of the utterance and can more easily lead to misunderstanding. In B.4, for example, the Romani child has used a conjunction (kok) that is the most direct translation of the Romani conjunction (kanā) normally used in this context. We have examples of literal translation on the morphological level as well, e.g. B.3, where a reflexive form is used, due to the fact that the reflexive verb forms (with the particle peske) are especially common in the local Romani dialect. And perhaps the most obvious case of literal translation is on the syntactic level when a whole sentence is translated "word by word" as in C.1.

Overgeneralization

A number of the errors in the corpus seem to be due to processes of over-generalization in the acquisition of Bulgarian, as in L2. Often this looks like a "reverse transfer". In examples like A.6 where the insertion of -l- or the drop of initial r- leading to a form like...
Conclusions

The error analysis of the speech of minority children acquiring Bulgarian described in this paper was in many ways a pilot study. Future research should devote more detailed attention to the speech errors of the Turkish and Roma children as separate groups. Better knowledge of the dialects that function as L1 should permit more precise explanation of interferential motivations for the errors than was done in this paper. Also, the corpus of data could be gathered in more natural and more varied situations than in narratives that the children were asked to compose.

However, even this attempt at classification and explanation of the speech errors of Bulgarian Turkish and Bulgarian Romani children point to a number of factors, such as the effect of L1 transfer and overgeneralization, that have been neglected in the teaching of Bulgarian to minority children over the past decades. If more special attention were devoted to the difficulties of minority children, much better results could presumably obtained in their acquisition of Bulgarian as L2, which would greatly contribute to their success in Bulgarian society in general.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my friend Jordan Zlatev for his help writing the paper and for the comments on the earlier drafts. Without grate help this paper would not be in its present form.

References


