

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The present issue opens with the first acoustic analysis of Polish vowels in the speech of hearing-impaired children. This was done under the direction of Professor Piotra Łobacz from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The article by Piotra Łobacz, Katarzyna Francuzik, and Emilia Szalkowska, presents vowel formant frequencies which were estimated using computerized speech. Statistical analyses were carried out for such factors as age (both biological and linguistic), gender, type of test used (reading or naming), and effect of consonant context. Although some individual differences occur between speakers, one important feature of vowel articulation was observed for all subjects, i.e., a decrease in the number of articulatory dimensions differentiating vowels. This results in a specific centralization in comparison with the analogous vowel area for hearing speakers. It was found that differences between vowels are most often neutralized in the direction of the frequency of the central vowel [ə]. The observed phenomenon of centralization in vowel articulation in hearing-impaired Polish speakers confirmed the general tendency reported for other languages with reference to vowels.

The next article, by Dr. Marija Maya Brala (University of Trieste), refers to the crosslinguistic analyses by Melissa Bowerman and collaborators (1992, 2001), on prepositional usage (“ON”, “IN” in English) in 33 natural languages. These analyses show that all the instances of spatial relations that are lexicalized in various languages can be categorized along a continuum that can systematically be mapped onto language, no matter which language one chooses. In her article, entitled *Understanding language specificity: causes and consequences*, M. M. Brala attempts first to locate the level at which language specificity occurs, and secondly – to see how this specificity can be integrated with the idea of a universal, cognitively-based human language system. She stresses that natural languages that exploit the word class of prepositions differ in their use. She suggests that this crosslinguistic variation is due to the fact that languages associate words with prelinguistic concepts at different levels of generality.

The third article in this issue, by Dr. Luule Mizera and Professor Tiia Tulviste (University of Tartu, Södertörn University College in Stockholm), focuses on a salient aspect within the context of a broader comparative study on family socialization. The authors take into account the relationship between the actual verbal behavior of mothers of early adolescent children and their reported child-rearing attitudes. The partici-

pants in the study were 21 mothers of early adolescents (10-13-year-olds) from two groups with different socio-cultural backgrounds – Estonians living in Estonia and Estonians residing in Sweden. The mothers' responses to statements on child rearing were compared with the frequency of verbal regulation of the child's behavior as well as speech obtained from real-life interactions. All regulations identified in the video recorded data were divided into categories of (1) verbal control of the child's behavior and (2) eliciting conversation from the child, according to McDonald and Pien's (1982) category system. The cultural context significantly affected the frequency of verbal regulation of target children's behavior.

The final three articles present analyses conducted in three Ph.D. studies under the supervision of Professor Anna Brzezińska at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. This group of articles is based on the fundamental assumptions and theses of Lev S. Vygotsky's theory. The first text by Sławomir Jabłoński presents the author's developmental model of reading and writing ability based on Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. The process of learning to read and write is regarded as the formation of a new higher mental function. In his article on the intellectual origins of written speech development, Rafał Dziurla stresses word meaning as basic for analyzing this problem. Word meaning is described as a three-dimensional structure, composed of the objective, the systemic, and the subjective dimensions. Development of written speech is presented in terms of the mutual relation between word meaning (as the basic consciousness unit) and the newly formed higher mental function emerging in the social environment. The final article by Marta Marchow explores the microgenesis of the emergence of written speech in children.

Barbara Bokus