

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The present issue comprises four articles. It opens with an invited text entitled *Enabling literacy in at-risk learners: Decoding surface form versus attending to meaning and narrative structure*, by John W. Oller, Jr. and his collaborators from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Linda C. Badon, John W. Oller, Jr., and Stephen D. Oller formulated a very important question: How can teachers/clinicians best enable at-risk learners to make sense of printed forms of the target language? The authors consider two methods in developing literacy:

- a surface form decoding (SFD) orientation which directs attention to letter-sound relations in words, and
- a content-based narrative (CBN) orientation which focuses attention on the essential content of activities.

The purpose of the study was to compare these two competing methods. The texts were divided into segments to be taught either by the SFD or CBN method to each of at-risk readers. Miscues and completeness of retellings for each method were analyzed. The results show that the CBN method, much better than the SFD one, helps learners to comprehend the meanings of the printed surface forms and even is better able to apply decoding strategies to sound out words, phrases, and higher units in reading aloud.

The second article is entitled *Variety of children's narratives as the reflection of individual differences in mental development*. The author, Irina Ovchinnikova from the Perm State University in Russia, analyzes the narratives generated in the "Frog, where are you?" picture book by 6-year-old children who passed the neuropsychological tests (Akhutina's variant of the test by Akhutina & Pylajeva, 2003). Children participating in the study belonged to three groups:

- children with lower capacities of both left- and right hemisphere strategies of visual-spatial information processing and a weak regulatory functions;
- children whose visual-spatial perception is satisfactorily mature, but whose regulatory functions are inadequate;
- children described as "neuropsychologically successful", who showed adequate maturity in both right- and left hemisphere strategies of perception and visual-spatial information processing and who show no weakness of the regulatory function during the neuropsychological tests.

The narratives by children from the first group are essentially different from the rest. It turned out that some specific features of narratives, like (a) incompleteness of global structure, i.e., omissions in the narrative field and distortion of the narrative line, (b) repetition of the same lexemes leading to a relative lexical poverty, and (c) syntactic simplicity, are connected with the immaturity of the gestalt strategy of visual-spatial information processing.

The third article on *Functional and neuroanatomical analysis of extralinguistic disorders in right hemisphere-damaged patients* was prepared by three authors from three different centers – Krzysztof Jodzio from the University of Gdańsk, Emilia Łojek from the University of Warsaw, and Karen Bryan from the University of Surrey. The purpose of the study was described by the authors as to determine the prevalence of extralinguistic (non-aphasic) disorders, its clinical picture, and neuroanatomical correlates. Two groups of subjects participated in the study:

- the RHD patients – a group of 40 stroke patients with damage to the right hemisphere (the cerebral perfusion pattern was diagnosed by SPECT findings),
- a control group of 60 healthy subjects.

The patients with damage to the right hemisphere, in comparison to healthy individuals, exhibited several communicative impairments, “apragmatic” in nature, including difficulties in performing tests (from the Polish version of the Right Hemisphere Language Battery, RHLB-PL) assessing inferential reasoning, lexical-semantic processes, metaphor comprehension, receptive prosody, and discourse. Language difficulties turned out to coexist with perfusion defects within the right hemisphere, mostly involving the frontal cortex and the thalamus. The group of RHD patients is not homogenous with respect to character and severity of language disturbances. The results confirmed earlier data from Ulatowska and collaborators’ studies showing that some patients present very mild and selective linguistic disturbances while others demonstrate more generalized difficulties.

The issue ends with the article entitled *The role of grammatical gender in the acquisition of noun inflection in Polish*, by Grzegorz Krajewski from the University of Manchester. The author introduces information dealing with Polish language system. There are seven grammatical cases in Polish, in both singular and plural. For the majority of nouns, this means up to fourteen different inflections. Many of them may be formed with more than one suffix. Adding to this a number of stem alterations and irregularities results in an extremely complex language system (p. 75 in this issue). The paper considers the role that grammatical gender may play in the acquisition of noun inflection in Polish. Three basic hypotheses were formulated. In order to test them, a preliminary analysis of naturalistic data from Richard Weist’s corpus was conducted. The results suggest that gender classes are available from the outset of the acquisition of noun inflection.