

Ivaskó – Komlósi¹ – Lengyel: Now, I will be the storyteller

The current presentation aims to discuss why telling a tale in the form of social interactions undoubtedly differs from telling an ordinary, everyday story. Studies in the field of developmental pragmatics focus on the abilities of children underlying the interpretation of stories for numerous reasons:

On the one hand, these cases enable researchers study the abilities underlying causal relationships triggered by the maturation in the frontal lobe.

On the other hand, research is being conducted in order to discover how children interpret different literal and non-literal elements.

The telling of stories and tales is a typical example of ostensive communication during which children acquire the cultural knowledge shared by others. Children's pedagogical stance and their sensitivity to ostensive stimuli enable them to acquire this shared knowledge much faster and more efficiently.

There are several ostensive signals that are typically present in those verbal communicative situations when stories and tales are told to children. This study discovers what kind of ostensive stimuli the tellers of tales/stories use in order to enable children to follow and understand their storytelling, a special way of verbal communication. Moreover, the study puts special emphasis on the way how the listeners (receivers) of tales manage to acquire the embedded pragmatic signals not only in order to understand them, but also to make use of them adequately as a creative language user (similarly to the way they use grammatical structures).

In the pragmatics of tales and the telling of tales, there are ostensive stimuli that can be identified as ones generally used to make it mutually understood that the speaker wants the listener to realize that she talks about a place and time different from those of the communicative situation, and she gives account of events that are not connected to the reality of the communicative event. That is why elements occurring in tales such as "once upon a time" or "a long, long time ago" function as special verbal phrases drawing the joint attention of the partners to the aforementioned fact. Other similarly distinct physical features/signals are the rise in the storyteller's pitch or his expressive and more intensive speech. Finally, lines such as "All is well that ends well.", "And ever since then, that is the way it has been." or "Snip, snap, snout, this tale's told out." mark the end of the joint attention scene.

The present study aims to show that children at the ages of 3 and 4 (who can already comprehend figurative language) are already able to use these stimuli typical of tales and the way these tales are told.

In order to give an answer to the question, Gergely & Watson's (1995) model of social bio-feedback is of great importance in the theoretical framework of this study, as they argue that children learn these two types of signal use by means of their communicative partner's behavioural reactions marking (exaggerating), mirroring, and/or punishing, and/or rewarding them. Developing children are sensitive to this kind of contingent reactivity, which makes it possible for them to be able to differentiate between the ostensive stimuli attributed to the telling of tales and those of ordinary stories concerning their everyday lives.

¹ ***The publication/presentation is supported by the European Union and co-funded by the European Social Fund.***

Project title: "Broadening the knowledge base and supporting the long term professional sustainability of the Research University Centre of Excellence at the University of Szeged by ensuring the rising generation of excellent scientists."

Project number: TÁMOP-4.2.2/B-10/1-2010-0012

