

## RÉSUMÉ

### Comparative Research of Child Lexis

The study presents results of comparative research in a special area of lexis used by children aged between two and five (child speech) and adults when talking to children (child-directed speech) in the Slovak and English languages. It focuses on the term child word (in the Anglo-American linguistic tradition the term babytalk form is preferred), its status and main characteristics within Slovak and Anglo-American linguistics. Although the theoretical background of the study is based on the linguistic tradition of both languages, it offers a new definition of the term child word (also child lexis), as well as the classification and brief characteristics of individual child word types in the Slovak and English languages.

The research is based on data gathered via one of the most common methods of lexicographic research – a questionnaire. It surveyed how the same referent was denoted by children and by adults when talking to children in Slovak and English. Individual expressions were compared and classified into stylistic categories. Based on this classification and criteria given for child words, the child words were defined as all words in the language with positive emotional qualities that are primarily used in child-directed speech and in child speech. They are divided into 1. diminutives, 2. euphemisms, 3. expressions denoting kinship, 4. interjections and onomatopoeic expressions and 5. metaphoric and metonymic expressions.

Child speech and child-directed speech are treated as two specific registers: child speech is characterised as a simple register and child-directed speech as a simplified register. Both these registers are used in the same situation – in communication between an adult (or older child) and a small child.

After having defined the term child word and its content, Slovak and English dictionaries of child words were created. They include all the lexemes from the gathered material which comply with the definition of the child word. The child lexis in both languages has been further analysed from phonematic, syllabic, morphological, word-formative and semantic points of view. The results of these analyses have been subsequently compared in order to find similarities and differences in child words of the analysed languages.

Phonematic characteristics deal with the frequency of vowels and consonants in child words and try to identify central and peripheral phonemes in the Slovak and English child lexis. It also concentrates on consonant clusters – their frequency, position and structure.

As for the frequency of vowels, the most frequent vowel in the Slovak child lexis is a short vowel /a/, probably due to its relatively easy articulation. This statement may be proved by other linguists' findings according to which this vowel (or at least its various manifestations in the child speech) is the first vocalic element occurring in the child speech because it has the easiest pronunciation among all vowels, e.g.: *mama, tata, bam, a-a, há-há, da, ham-ham*.

In the English child lexis, a short non-phonemic symbol /i/ has the highest frequency because it is pronounced in the only productive diminutive endings in the child lexis -y, -ie, e.g.: *blankie* also *blanky* /*.blɔŋki*/; *breddy* also *breddie* /*.bredɪ*/; *doggy* also *doggie* /*.d:gi*/ etc. This result at the same time proves one of the basic features of the English child lexis – its high diminutivisation.

As for peripheral elements in the child lexis of both languages, long vowels /ó/ and /é/ in Slovak and /ɜ:/ and /j:/ in English proved their position on the periphery of the vocalic subsystems of the analysed languages.

As far as consonants are concerned, phonemes with the highest frequency are the same in both, the Slovak and English child lexis: /p, t, k, b, m, n/, out of which bilabials /p/, /b/, /m/ belong to the centre of the child lexis consonantal subsystem, because they are the easiest consonants to pronounce for children.

The ratio of consonants to vowels in the Slovak child lexis is 1.37:1 and in the English child lexis it is 1.32:1. This difference (0.05) is considered to be insignificant and it can be stated that the ratio of consonants to vowels in the child lexis of both languages is equal. It follows that there are consonant clusters occurring in child lexis which have the same characteristics in the English and Slovak child words: The most frequent type of consonant cluster is a two-consonant cluster in intervocalic position, i.e. between two syllables. Absence of three- and four-consonant clusters in the analysed child lexis proves one of the basic features of the child speech register – its simplicity, and one of the basic features of the child-directed speech register – its tendency to simplification. Zero occurrence of consonant clusters in a final position confirms this tendency.

Syllabic characteristics focus on the number of syllables, frequency of short and long syllables and the structure of the syllable in Slovak and English child words.

Based on the research, disyllabic lexemes with both syllables short have a dominant position in the child lexis of both analysed languages. (From a stylistic point of view, they consist predominantly of diminutives and euphemisms.) As for the structure of the syllable,

there is a strong tendency to open syllables, namely to the type CV (56.5 %) in the Slovak child lexis. On the other hand, the ratio between open and closed syllables in the English child lexis is equal and the following structures of syllables are preferred: CVC (40 %), CV (24 %), and V (22 %) of the total number of syllables.

As far as morphological characteristics are concerned, the attention has been focused on word classes, particularly on the concordance between general meaning of word class and form by which it is expressed, because child lexis shows several peculiarities in this respect.

Based on the research, there are two ways of expressing general meaning of word classes in child lexis: (1) when there is concordance between the general meaning of word class and the form by which it is expressed (87 % of lexemes in Slovak, 84 % in English) and (2) when there is not concordance between the general meaning of word class and the form by which it is expressed (13 % of lexemes in Slovak, 16 % in English). The second possibility is much less frequent but typical of the child lexis in both languages. It consists in the fact that the general meaning of meaningful word classes (nouns, verbs and adjectives) is expressed by an onomatopoeic form. Lexemes in which this asymmetry between the form and meaning is identifiable then belong within word classes to a so-called transitional category. The above-mentioned findings have proved an indisputable position of onomatopoeic words in the child lexis of both languages.

Word-formative characteristics focus on the frequency of motivated and unmotivated child words and the structure of motivated lexemes: the types of word-formative bases have been identified; word-formative elements and their frequency have been analysed and word-formative processes which participate in coining Slovak and English child words have been specified. The motivated units have been further classified into word-formative types, onomasiological categories and types of onomasiological categories.

The centre of child lexis is represented by diminutives, thus the most productive word-formative process within the Slovak and English child lexis is suffixation, namely suffixation by attaching diminutive suffixes. It follows that word-formative bases of motivated units predominantly belong to the same word classes as word-formative bases of motivating units. As for word-formative elements, the Slovak child lexis displays a more extensive repertoire of productive diminutive suffixes when compared to the English child lexis where the vast majority of diminutives is formed only by two productive diminutive suffixes *-y* and *-ie*. On

the basis of high diminutivisation of child lexis, the modificational onomasiological category has the uppermost position in both the analysed languages.

Semantic characteristics of child words concentrate on meanings of lexemes, especially on relations between the form and meaning within individual lexemes (symmetry or asymmetry between form and meaning) and on mutual relations among the forms and meanings within the Slovak and English child lexis.

Slovak and English child words occurring in our dictionaries can be divided into the same semantic classes:

1. Relatives (*mamička, tatinko, babinka, deduško, mommy, nannie, daddy, grandpa, sissy ...*);
2. Food and drink (*kašinka, čajiček, hamka, mlsanička, breddie/y, milkie, goody, din-din ...*);
3. Things of everyday use (*plienočka, fláštička, dudulka, nočníček, didee, beddie, bot-bot ...*);
4. Toys (*autičko, vláčik, havinko, miňuška, ballie, choo-choo train, dolly, teddy-bear ...*);
5. Animals (*kvičko, cipka, mňauko, koniček, kozička, doggy, duckie, cowie, cattie, piggie ...*);
6. Body parts (*hlavinka, očičká, pusinka, brušul'ko, rúčatká, belly, botty, footie, titties ...*);
7. Body functions (*papenkať, cikušať, kakošiť, hajuškať, ham, pee-pee, wee-wee, poo(h) ...*);
8. Daily routine (*kúpkat' sa, hrajkat' sa, maznoškovať sa, bathy-byes, huggie, go walkies ...*);
9. Expressing position and its change (*sadkať si, hopkať si, postavinkať sa, bacnúť, boom*);
10. Descriptive words (*peknučký, dobrunký, čistulinký, čačany, bebený, ickle, yummy ...*).

An overlap between some semantic classes may occur, e. g. between names of toys and animals because a child usually uses the same lexeme to denote toys (4.) and animals (5.) in pictures or real animals.

As for the relation between the form and meaning of Slovak child words, the vast majority of lexemes is monosemic (only 15 lexemes out of 517 are polysemic), but at the same time there is a remarkable asymmetry between the form and meaning in the sense that the overwhelming majority of child words is included in the relations of synonymy. This synonymy is based on the cumulation and various combinations of stylistic features expressing positive attitude and emotions (only 6 lexemes out of 517 do not have a synonym).

In the English child lexis, the vast majority of lexemes is monosemic, as well (only 7 out of 121 lexemes are polysemic), but unlike Slovak, the English child lexis is not so rich in synonyms – only 30 lexemes have at least one synonym. This situation is probably caused by the fact that Slovak has an uncomparably richer inventory of productive diminutive endings than English, which enables it to produce much more synonyms. As was mentioned above,

English has only two productive diminutive endings (based on the research). Apart from this, the Slovak child lexis is much richer in euphemisms than the English child lexis and it undoubtedly plays its role in this situation, as well.