

Abstract

Grammar acquisition is a widely researched area in international psycholinguistics. A great amount of research has focused on determining the order of acquiring grammatical words and forms in individual languages (e.g. Bloom et al., 1980; Brown, 1973; de Villiers & de Villiers, 1973). By contrast, as regards Czech, to this day there has been only a limited amount of data on the process of the acquisition of grammar words and forms based on empirical research or sourced from an adequate number of child respondents. Some findings about Czech grammar acquisition were introduced e.g. by Pačesová (1979), Chejnová (2016a) or Smolík (2002). The present dissertation therefore aims to collect descriptive data on the acquisition of grammatical words and forms in Czech. It also determines whether these grammar acquisition data can be collected using parent reports (e.g. Fenson et al., 1993, 2007; Rescorla, 1989), a method which has been used primarily to monitor the acquisition of lexis. Grammar acquisition has been examined through parent reports only to a limited extent.

The dissertation comprises five parent report surveys, aimed at the acquisition of noun and adjective cases, verb forms, prepositions, interrogative expressions, conjunctions and linking expressions. Data were collected from a total of 580 children aged between 18 and 48 months (each survey yielded a sample of more than 100 children). Based on the parent report data, logistic regression was used to estimate the age when the grammatical words and forms at hand are acquired. This allowed for determining the order in which the individual grammatical words and forms are acquired in Czech.

Further, the dissertation examined whether the parent reports produced accurate data about the acquisition of grammatical words and forms. The accuracy of the parent reports was verified using transcripts from the Czech corpus of children's speech in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000; Czech corpus: Chromá et al., n.d.) and recordings of children's communication at a children's speech lab (Smolík & Bláhová, 2021). The estimated age when

noun cases, prepositions and interrogatives are acquired was correlated with their frequency and the age of first emergence in these children's speech transcripts. With noun case, the additional criterion of case diversity was applied, recording the number of different nouns used with a particular case by the children in the transcripts. The analyses have indicated that the age of acquiring the given grammatical words and forms displays a medium to strong correlation with all the abovementioned criteria. The results suggests that parent reports record the same main tendencies of grammatical word and form acquisition as do children's speech transcripts.

On the example of Czech, this dissertation illustrates that parent reports produce accurate data about grammar acquisition. At the same time it presents findings about the order of acquisition of a range of grammatical words and forms acquired by Czech children in the first four years of their life.

Key words

first language acquisition, acquisition of grammar, Czech, parent reports, accuracy of parent reports