

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *1.1. Data and Method*

1.1.1. This study is devoted to the analysis of the longitudinal corpus data of a Lithuanian girl named Rūta. Her speech was recorded in natural everyday situations by her Mother<sup>2</sup>, an educated philologist. Rūta is a first-born and only child of a middle-class family living in Vilnius. Data collection<sup>3</sup> started in November 1993, when the child was 1;3, and continued up to 1996, when she was about 3;5. Recordings were made three or four times per week and they last for about fifteen minutes each. For the present study we have chosen to analyse Rūta's speech covering the period from 1;7 to 2;6<sup>4</sup>. The choice was influenced by the fact that Rūta's onset of morphological development can be dated approximately around the age of 1;7. The data after 2;6 are not yet fully transcribed. This study contains 23 tapes, which give us 35 hours of recordings.

1.1.2. The recorded speech was transcribed by the girl's Mother according to the requirements of CHILDES (MacWhinney & Snow 1990). Transcripts were coded<sup>5</sup> for the morphological analysis and double-checked. Adult utterances were transcribed orthographically; the child's utterances in addition were transcribed phonetically. Contextual notes were inserted where necessary.

1.1.3. A fragment of a transcribed and coded text follows. Example<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> Aurelija Kaškelevičienė has graduated from Vilnius University (Lithuanian philology) and is teaching Lithuanian at the same university.

<sup>3</sup> The Austrian Academy of Sciences (a grant to W. U. Dressler) supported data collection.

<sup>4</sup> By 'period of observation' referred to throughout the study is meant the period from 1;7 to 2;6 unless stated differently. Usually only year and month is given (e.g., 1;8), but when a form rather expected only from 1;9 onwards, occurs already in 1;8, but only at the end of this month, then also the day is indicated (e.g., 1;8.27).

<sup>5</sup> Transcripts were coded by Paweł Wójcik and the author of this study.

<sup>6</sup> The meanings of symbols in the coding: #N – noun, #V – verb, PER – person, BDP – body parts; DDD – diminutive; FM – feminine gender, MS – masculine gender; PR – proper noun, CM – common noun. 08 – declensional class. Instead of Lithuanian letters with diacritics a combination of two signs was used (e.g., š = s~, ū = u').

@Begin

@Participants: RUT Ruta Target Child, MAM Mama Mother, TEV Tevas Father, MOC Mociute GrandMother.

@Birth of RUT: 28–JUL–1992

@Tape: RUT 17

@Filename: Rut202a

@Coding: CHAT 5–APR–1989

@Age: 2;2.4

@Date: 01–OCT–1994

@Sit: 10 val. R neseniai atsike'le'. M ruos~iasi s~ukuoti Ru'ta~.

\*RUT: Mamyte, leisk.

%mor: #N&PER:MAMA::DDD:08:FM:PR:W0|Mamyte'\_  
SG:VOC:mamyte,  
#V:leisk.

%pho: Mamyte, leisk.

\*MAM: Ateik, suris~iu kasytes.

%moa: #V:ateik, #V:suris~iu  
#N&BDP:KASA::DDD:08:FM:CM:W0|kasyte'\_PL:  
ACC:kasytes

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@Age: 1;8.2

@Sit: 21.30 val. R varto knyga~.

\*MAM: Kas c~ia?

%moa: #PRONOM:kas #PROADV:c~ia?

\*RUT: Mes~kyte' = metyte'.

%mor: #N&ANI:MES~KA::DDD:08:FM:CM:W0|mes~kyte'  
\_SG:NOM:mes~kyte'='metyte'

%pho: Metyte' [=mes~kyte'].

1.1.4. Citations (nursery rhymes, songs and other non-creative utterances), onomatopoeia, baby-talk forms were excluded from the material to be analysed. The words similar to nouns in form, but which had no meaning in adult language were coded as nouns. The noun forms which directly occurred after adult utterances were not excluded.

1.1.5. As mentioned above, systematic analyses of Lithuanian child language acquisition are not numerous. The data provided by Rūta's corpus have been analysed in terms of morphological development. Specifically, it was looked into the acquisition of noun and verb morphology in Lithuanian. The results suggested by the analysis of Rūta's data were

compared with the relevant aspects of other studies, carried out in typologically close languages, Latvian and Russian, as well as typologically distant Greek, Italian, German, English, or French. The acquisition of Latvian and Russian child language was researched applying the method of diary studies by Rūķe-Draviņa (1982, 1993) and Gvozdev (1949).

### 1.2. Theoretical Basis of the Study

1.2.1. Beyond descriptive goals, this study aims at a theory-guided analysis of the very first phases in the acquisition of morphology (*pre-morphology, protomorphology and modularised morphology*) as defined by Dressler & Karpf (1995) and Dressler (1997). In addition, it makes use of the basic concepts in the theory of *opposition and markedness* (Jacobson 1971, Greenberg 1966) and the model of *self-organisation* (Karpf 1990, 1993, Dressler & Karpf 1995).

The main principle of natural theory can be summarised as ‘more or less natural’, which corresponds to ‘more or less easy for the human brain’ (Dressler et al. 1987). With respect to children who acquire their native language, this principle means that easier morphological forms are mastered faster. Morphologically less complicated forms are characterised as being rule-derived, transparent (i.e., their meaning is more easily segmentable), unmarked and showing frequent usage.

1.2.2. According to the model of self-organisation, language acquisition is an ongoing interaction between genetic inheritance/brain and the environment (Karpf 1990). Language acquisition (including the development of morphology) is based on the selection of input data, or the search for coherent features (Karpf 1993). This process is universal and should be found in the development of all languages regardless semantic or morphosyntactic differences (Zangl 1997). The selection of input data depends on patterns *frequency, saliency, and transparency*.

1.2.3. Different levels of language acquisition constitute a complicated and dynamic process (cf. Bowerman 1982, 1993, Karmiloff-Smith 1993). This is explained by the fact that children actively interact with their environment and, in doing so, acquire more and more relevant information. The constant increase in information and knowledge involves a qualitative and quantitative modification of the respective data according to the available conditions of the systems (Zangl 1997). In the process of achieving adult competence, a child is exposed to the following transitional phases: *initial* (premorphology), *intermediate* (protomorphology), and *final* (modularised morphology). We will consider the three of them in this order.

1.2.4. *The initial phase (premorphology)*. The premorphological phase of language acquisition shows no system of grammatical morphology yet, only precursors of later grammatical rules, which consist of rote-learned forms (Dressler 1997). Children show a high tendency towards imitation, and the forms which they produce are morphologically correct due to the fact that a child often hears and easily memorises common everyday phrases and verbal routines (cf. Dore 1979, 1985, McTear 1985, Garvey 1984).

1.2.5. *The intermediate phase (protomorphology)*. In this phase children demonstrate their ability to search for and apply coherent, recurring patterns (Marchman & Bates 1994). Children start to construct morphological patterns of rules creatively, and many of such rules are overgeneralised (see Smoczyńska 1986, Ceytlin 1988, Bybee 1995, Dressler 1997). This period is characterised by children's attempts to create a more uniform grammar of the adult type (Rūķe-Draviņa 1973, Zangl 1997).

1.2.6. *The final phase (modularised morphology)*. In this phase the basic language-specific properties of each morphological system (e.g., noun inflection, verb inflection, or derivational morphology) are productively mastered (Dressler 1998). Children are able to understand and to produce patterns of a higher degree of complexity. During this period children develop abilities to understand less frequent, less transparent and less salient linguistic structures.

1.2.7. To sum up, the main focus of the study is the acquisition of the grammatical categories of the noun, namely, the categories of number, case and the diminutive category. This choice was influenced by the fact that first, these particular noun categories tend to emerge early; second, they relate to basic, yet different, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of the noun (Dressler 1998). The preliminary results provided by the 'Crosslinguistic Project of Pre- and Protomorphology in Language Acquisition' project allow us to hypothesise that the category of number will emerge earlier than the category of case, and that the category of gender will be acquired even later. Rūta's data will be used to check claims advanced in the literature to the effect that crosslinguistically noun morphology is acquired in the following order: (1) diminutive, (2) number, (3) case. The structure of the study follows this particular pattern.

1.2.8. There are several opinions on the question of the acquisition of diminutive, number and case forms. Two polar points of view are: first, we consider the form to be acquired when its marker emerges and is regularly used by a child, second, we consider the form to be acquired

when the set of basic meanings of this form are acquired. The criterion in this study is the following: a case, for example, is considered to be primarily acquired by a child, when a child uses the formal marker for several words in the right context at least for one of the prototypical case meanings (Voeikova 1998). When the basic meaning of a case is used in different contexts, then the meaning of the case is considered to be acquired.