



Z A S

Z A S — Schützenstraße 18 — 10117 Berlin

Leibniz-Zentrum  
Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

*PD Dr. Natalia Gagarina*  
gagarina@leibniz-zas.de  
Tel +49(0)30 · 20192-506

Berlin, 09.08.2018

## **Assessment of the Habilitation of Pavla Chejnová**

**Title: *Acquisition of Morphological Categories and Vocabulary in Early Ontogenesis of a Czech Child***

In her habilitation, Mrs. Pavla Chejnová presents a longitudinal investigation of the early development of lexicon and morphology – the case study of a late talker – guided by the theoretical principles of the pre- and protomorphology of Dressler et al. 1997. The period investigated – from the first words up to the multiword sentences – is the most sensitive and the most important in the course of language acquisition. By age three or three and a half the basics of morphology and syntax is usually acquired Irrespectively of the language. Thus, the study of Mrs. Pavla Chejnová scrutinizes the onset and initial period of language acquisition on an example of a morphologically-rich Slavic language, Czech. Such a large-scale longitudinal investigation is a novum, since it scrutinizes not only an initial period of the acquisition of lexicon in one of the ‘under-investigated’ Slavic languages – Czech – but also embraces morphology in the main word classes. In particular, the focus is on the “*acquisition of grammatical categories of inflectional parts of speech, namely, nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs*” (p.10). The study embraces both, the pre- and protomorphological phases of first monolingual language acquisition and targets the development of the mini-paradigms in one child, who is a later-talker. The results, confirm the ‘universality’ of the developmental path but shows different timing in the acquisition of morphological categories as compared to the development of the comparative categories in other Slavic languages.



Z A S

The habilitation of Mrs. Pavla Chejnová consists of the *Introduction*, 11 chapters and additional parts: *References, Appendix, List of Abbreviations, Glossary, Resumé, Author and Subject Index*.

In the first theoretical chapter, Mrs. Pavla Chejnová presents the state-of-the-art of research. Chapters three to eleven are dedicated to the study itself, the results and the discussion compose chapter twelve.

In the *Introduction*, the theoretical background is outlined and the organization of the dissertation is described. I feel that the explicit statement of goals and the objectives of the study could be stated explicitly in the introduction. Also, the terminology can be described in more details here.

The first theoretical chapter concentrates on the psychological and psycholinguistic perspective. It broadly presents the area of developmental psycholinguistics and specifies that the majority of previous studies concentration on the exploration of English. Within the second subchapter the author addresses the cross-linguistic research and briefly mentions cross-linguistic Studies of Slobin (ed.), but doesn't go into the details. I think, the studies on the acquisition of the relevant categories in other typologically similar languages can be described in more details here. At the of this subchapter the author presents the theoretical background of the habilitation and described the pre-, protomorphological phases as well as morphology proper.

The next chapter on *Methodology and procedures* consists of three subsections. Mrs. Pavla Chejnová first addresses methods of obtaining child languages data and then presents in details different types of data and the methodology of research.

The most core-stone chapters of the habilitation are the chapters four and six (*Chapter 4: Acquisition of lexicon, Chapter 6: Onset of grammatical contrasts in the child's development*) and also the chapters dedicated to the acquisition of the morphological categories of the selected parts of speech, *nouns, adjectives, pronouns* and *verbs*. In chapters four Mrs. Pavla Chejnová very briefly presents the first words of the recorded child. She then moves to the very details analyses of the first fifty words produced by a target child. The comparison with the first words of the other children from the studies of Pačesova, 1968, Průcha, 2011 and Crystal, 1986 to her own data gives a reader a good base for the comparison of the first words. The development of the lexicon is carefully



Z A S

presented in the next subchapter. The result for Czech confirm the previous findings on the *50 words-mile-stone*, namely, when the number of the produced lexemes in the children investigated, reached this number, the first two- and three-word utterances occur in the speech. In the next sections, the interrelation of the lexicon and grammar, lexicon and semantic development are investigated. While the chapter provides the very rich and scrutinizes analyses I feel that more interpretations could be given here and more interaction of the different language areas could be presented by the more in-depth descriptions.

Chapter 5 *Grammatical Categories of Czech* is incorporated in the habilitation in an 'elegant' way. Is it situated within the empirical part of the study but 'opens' its second part dedicated to the acquisition of morphology. It provides the main information necessary for the subsequent chapters, but it could be a little bit more detailed with the in-depth look into the e.g. perfective and imperfective aspect and/or aspectual pairs.

Chapter six examines the early stages of the acquisition of grammatical contrasts. Also in this chapter some detailed analyses are presented. Table 15, for example, depicts the production of the utterances containing 3 to 10 words. It is interesting, how the stability in the use of e.g. 4-word utterance is being established. The analysis of the data presented in this table allowed for the U-shape development in syntax. After the decrease or gap in the use of e.g. 4- and 5-word utterances the number become more stable. I would be curious to see more in-depth data descriptions here.

The next four chapters address morphological categories in four word classes, nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs. They are all similarly structured and this helps the reader to read through the text and makes it coherent. The chapter begin with the description of the *base form*, then the emergence of the first mini-paradigms is traced, the TTR and further development is presented. Summary concludes each chapter. This part is written very thorough and accurate, showing the investigative strength of Mrs. Pavla Chejnová as a researcher.

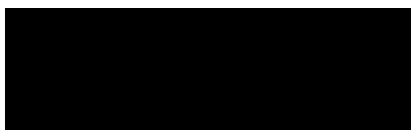
*General discussion and conclusion* terminates this fundamental work. The description of the development is generalized and gives an overview of the processed of monolingual acquisition of lexicon and grammar. Mrs. Pavla Chejnová have found in her work, that nominal and verbal forms develop in parallel, that the *"the peak of the protomorphological period is <...> somewhere between age 3;0 and 3;6"* (p.126)



Z A S

(however, it is a bit strange for that this peak lasts so long – 6 month; may be this is because the child is a late talker?), nominal base forms as compared to verbal forms predominate in the data. As far as the development of miniparadigms are concerned, differences between various word classes were observed (just to name some results). All research questions of the habilitation were answered and the rich empirical base was provided. Without the detailed repetition of all results of this work, I would like to stress their importance for research on the early acquisition of Slavic languages, in particular, and monolingual first language acquisition, in general. I found 12.4. very interesting – here Mrs. Pavla Chejnová incorporated the results of her work into the general context of research. It would be nice to have this chapter even more elaborated and scrutinized.

An overall estimation of the scientific work of Mrs. Pavla Chejnová: The habilitation represents original research: it provides a clearly structured and well described study of the initial stages of the monolingual acquisition of lexicon and morphology. Mrs. Pavla Chejnová has shown a thorough and investigative scientific curiosity and an ability to work with a big amount of longitudinal spontaneous data. The results are a novum and not only close the gap in the studies on Slavic languages, but can be also useful for practitioners working with the late talkers. The text is coherent and the parts logically correspond to each other. The small comments and critical points don't decrease the high value of this work, which deserves the high degree.



PD Dr. Natalia Gagarina