

NARRATIVE COMPETENCE: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF STORYTELLING IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine the characteristics of storytelling in preschool children. The study included 60 children, aged four, five and six years. The characteristics of the narration of a story on the macrolinguistic and microlinguistic plane were assessed by applying the Comic story task (Kostić, Vladisavljević & Popović, 1983).

The results of the macrolinguistic structure of storytelling showed that focus in four and five-year-olds is in describing the introductory event and the activities leading to a goal. In contrast, with six-year-old children story patterns exist at a cognitive level, since the elements of the comic story are consistently described in just slightly less than half of the them.

The results of the microlinguistic structure of storytelling showed that the four-year-olds stories predominantly contain simple sentences, while simple-extended and dependent-complex syntactic constructions dominate in the stories of five-year-olds. In contrast, there is a tendency in six-year-olds to use complex (consecutive, dependent) sentences. Storytelling in children develops gradually over the preschool period, so instructions for storytelling is important for all children, especially for those at risk for or with language learning impairments.

Key words: language development, storytelling, preschool children.

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НАРАТИВНА КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТ: ПРЕЛИМИНАРНА СТУДИЈА ПРИПОВЕДАЊА ПРИЧЕ КОД ДЕЦЕ ПРЕДШКОЛСКОГ УЗРАСТА

Апстракт

Циљ овог истраживања је утврђивање карактеристика приповедања приче код деце предшколског узраста. Истраживањем је обухваћено 60 деце, узраста од четири, пет и шест година. Карактеристике приповедања приче код деце на макролингвистичком и микролингвистичком плану процењене су применом задатка Стрип прича (Костић, Владисављевић & Поповић, 1983).

Резултати истраживања макролингвистичке структуре приче су показали, да се код четворогодишњака и петогодишњака фокус приповедања приче налази у описивању уводног догађаја и активности којима се долази до циља. За разлику од њих, код шестогодишњака шема приче постоји на сазнајном нивоу, будући да су елементи стрип приче конзистентно описивани у нешто мање од половине деце.

Анализом резултата микролингвистичке структуре приче утврђено је да приче четворогодишњака преобладају садрже просте реченице, док просто-проширене и зависно-сложене синтаксичке конструкције доминирају у наративном дискурсу петогодишњака. За разлику од њих, у групи шестогодишњака је присутна тенденција коришћења сложених (напоредних, зависних) реченица. Приповедање приче код деце постепено се развија током предшколског периода, а савети о подстицају развоја ове способности су важни за сву децу, посебно за децу са присуством ризико фактора на рођењу или децу са дефицитима у развоју говора и језика.

Кључне речи: језички развој, приповедање приче, деца предшколског узраста.

INTRODUCTION

A key task of early childhood education is to develop oral discourse. Lawrence and Snow (2011) define oral discourse as extended oral production, centred around a topic, activity or goal. Oral discourse involves the comprehension, production, and recall of extended units of speech. Stories and oral discourse are two major genres of narration. Stories involve characters that engage in goal-directed actions to resolve problems or complications. Storytelling facilitates children's ability to engage in patterns of discourse, such as learning how to verbally display their knowledge. Proficient vocabulary, inferencing and discourse skills are foundational for academic success and are particularly related to later skilled reading comprehension (Roth, 2009).

Young children are surrounded by stories every day (Genishi, & Dyson, 2009). Stories, whether told through children's picture books, songs, images, film, television or other popular media are among the most ancient and valuable forms of education for shaping children's perceptions of reality (Marshall, 2016). Common and classic story pattern form includes: introduction of setting and characters, introduction of problem or dilemma, rising action and plot development, insightful answer or solution, climactic scene and a quick, satisfying conclusion (Machado, 2013).

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), narration of a story requires macro-organization of discourse units involving the ability to sequence events, understand cause–event relationships and structures, and create a unified text. Specifically, this type of narratives requires the production of multiple linguistic propositions. They are expected to contain an introduction and an organized sequence of events that lead to a logical conclusion, and they require the narrator to carry on a monologue during which the listener assumes a relatively passive role. Thus, it is the narrator’s responsibility to present information in an organized, complete, and coherent manner without the expectation of substantial informational or extra-linguistic support from the listener (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Roth & Spekman, 1986).

The research of narration of a story is motivated by both conceptual and practical considerations. Conceptually, the narrative is considered a primary mode of human thought that is learned and used by children to organize and make sense of the world (Bruner, 1985). It is also a universal linguistic vehicle for constructing and transmitting meaning, and for acquiring knowledge. Further, narratives reflect the integration of an individual’s linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, and sociocultural background, and provide a mechanism for language socialization, the means by which children become members of their linguistic and cultural communities (Hardy, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1986).

Storytelling is a cornerstone of society, sharing experiences and values. Children can pass on the stories that have been given to them, they can share their own perspectives, and they can create their own stories from their imaginations. This narrative process helps children become part of the greater society at the same time that it builds their own literacy competency. Storytelling also engages the child emotionally, and allows them to construct meaning on a personal level (Engel, 1999; Farmer, 2004).

Storytelling is probably the first situation in which the child must sustain a monologue without the support of a conversational partner. It is a complex behavior that involves a kind of “story sense” and “story grammar.” To be coherent, a child’s story needs to be more than an unrelated series of events, as is often the case with beginning child storytellers (Machado, 2013).

In children’s fantasy world, storytelling has a great role since it provides a tool to reflect the children’s inner feelings. Storytelling that includes expressions of stories in a physical space can deeply enhance creativity and imagination (Sugimoto, 2011). Storytelling can be viewed as an activity that allows people to share their experiences, thoughts, or imagination with verbal statements.

This activity also enables children to use language without feeling any restriction or difficulty. Telling stories contributes to children’s lan-

guage ability by helping them choose the appropriate vocabulary and structure the stories in a coherent way (Loizou, Kyriakides, & Hadjicharalambous, 2011). Children have control in terms of using language in storytelling. Since storytelling does not require any systematic work for children, it provides them an enjoyable environment (Ryokai, Vaucelle & Cassell, 2003; Cassell & Ryokai, 2001).

While there have been many studies of language development in young children, storytelling has received little research attention. The method of narration of stories is frequently suggested in children's literature. However, a limited number of research studies have investigated storytelling and its possible influence on the language development of young children.

Ellis (1997) suggests that storytelling is the most effective way to develop listening skills. Storytelling also provides an opportunity to experience the difference between listening quietly and listening actively, by participating in the process. Many authors agree that storytelling helps teach children listen; it helps develop skills in both oral and written communication, while developing understanding of story schema, fluency and vocabulary acquisition (Kim, 1999; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Farrel & Nesel, 1982).

Collins (1999) determined that storytelling has many uses in the education of primary children, providing a conceptual framework for thinking, which allows children to shape experiences into a whole they can understand. Stories allow children to mentally map experiences and see pictures in their heads; telling traditional stories provides children with a model of language and thought that they can imitate. Peck (1989) said that telling stories in the classroom furthers oral and written language development, as well as comprehension for reading and listening.

Tabors, Snow, and Dickinson (2001) findings showed that a measure of narration of stories in kindergarten was one of four measures to correlate significantly with reading comprehension and receptive vocabulary in children. According to Maguire's (1985) study, storytelling serves many purposes including increased vocabulary and concentration, as well as developing the young child's ability to think symbolically and metaphorically. In an observational study conducted by Palmer, Harshbarger and Koch (2001), young children made gains in story concept, comprehension, vocabulary, and many other areas, after participating in a story time program using storytelling.

Agosto (2016) investigates the literacy benefits of oral storytelling on the sample of twenty second-grade students. Results of the study showed that oral storytelling improves: 1. Visualization, which is a foundational literacy skill, helping young readers to comprehend written texts; 2. Cognitive engagement, which also improves literacy; 3. Critical thinking, which is closely tied to cognitive engagement. They both involve

deep thinking about story content and meaning. 4. Story sequencing, which is the ability to identify different events in a story and place them in chronological order.

Storytelling is a medium that a teacher can develop and use to increase a child's enjoyment of language. It can be defined as easy, spontaneous, intimate sharing of a narrative with one or many persons. The storyteller relates, pictures, imagines, builds what happens, and crafts characters, all of which is manifested through the storyteller's voice and body (Machado, 2013).

The interaction in storytelling is personal and immediate. Children learn the social aspects of language through observation and participation in this activity (Craig, Hull, Haggart & Crowder 2001). Eder (2007) describes storytelling as a powerful strategy for setting patterns of meaning. Through participation in storytelling experiences, children learn to build a sense of story by anticipating features of the genre, including how a story may begin and end (Craig, Hull, Haggart & Crowder, 2001). The development of a sense of story allows children to make better predictions, to anticipate what is next, to increase awareness of cause and effect, sequence events, and develop other skills that aid comprehension. Storytelling further assists in the development of a sense of story by incorporating the use of essential story elements. These elements include point of view, plot, style, characters, setting, and theme (Haven & Ducey, 2007). Comprehension, critical listening and thinking skills are also developed by combining storytelling with questioning, imagery, inferencing and retelling (Craig, Hull, Haggart & Crowder, 2001).

Children develop a "sense of story" naturally during their preschool years through experiences with various forms of narration (Westby, 1994). In an intermediate stage, between 3 and 4 years of age, children begin to chain events together that are sequenced temporally, but the event sequences are not anchored to or motivated by a central theme. Frequently, children at this stage describe a series of events in an additive fashion. Storytelling emerges around the age of 5. Children acquire the basic structure of stories, referred to as the "story schema," which involves knowledge that a story has a beginning, middle and end with a theme or plot that ties events together. This knowledge gives rise to fictional narratives, and children begin to understand and produce stories about made-up experiences that are not part of the immediate context (Roth, 2009) At this age, a qualitative shift occurs in children's narratives, and their stories now reflect knowledge of basic plot structure. These true/classic narratives contain a clearly demarcated beginning, middle and end, and the events are goal-oriented, or linked to a central theme or character. Moreover, causation is evident; story events are linked to events that precede or follow in true temporal relationships. While story knowledge continues to develop into more complex narrative

forms, it is at this point that children are said to have internalized knowledge of the story form, and use this knowledge to understand, remember and construct stories.

Narration of stories in education has been the focus of increased attention over the last few decades. To understand or create stories children must understand and create plots, the roles characters may play, the way they think and what motivates them to act. Preschool children have developed awareness about elements that are necessary for formation of cohesive and coherent stories, but the complexity of this task requires integration of a lot of information and loads the working memory. The consequence of that is variability of preschool children's achievement in storytelling, as well as dependence on the structuring of stimuli that are used in the task of storytelling assessment (for example remembering realistic and fantastic events as nonstructured stimulus over retelling a familiar story and/or generating a story in pictures as the most structured stimulus). Dependence on stimulus structuring during narration of a story is also present with children of lower grades of elementary school, which has been shown by the research in which the children of typical development and children with specific language disorders make a better structure of the story when they retell it than when they have to generate it (Merritt & Liles, 1989).

Some research indicates that preschool children are not fully competent to create stories, though this varies depending on the method of eliciting narratives. For example, Stein and Glenn (1975) argue that children's stories must first contain causal connectives linking events and then be goal-based and identifiable as such by adults. Leondar (1977) found that 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds can create stories that are based almost exclusively on temporal connectives, but they don't need to use causal connectives. Older children's stories are more complex and include more of the structural elements, such as setting information, a problem and its resolution, or an ending. For example, only 25% of preschoolers include a problem, and even fewer, 20%, a resolution of the problem in a story (Hudson & Shapiro 1991).

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) pointed out that understanding and production of stories represents one of the elements whose development precedes and conditions development of reading and writing skills. Results of a longitudinal study emphasize that not all aspects of narration of stories are predictors of reading and writing skills development. The amount of relevant information given from the child's storytelling (for example during description of situational pictures), as well as their ability to estimate and describe the emotional state of characters in the story, have shown to be good predictors of developing skills of understanding read and organizing written text (Griffin, Hemphil, Camp & Wolf, 2004). Results from some of the studies have shown that assessment of storytelling with preschool children, although not a very reliable instrument in diagnosing language

disorders, could help with prediction of achievements with the children with specific language disorders on other language tests (Pankratz, Plante, Vance & Insalaco, 2007). In the longitudinal study done on four and five-year-olds, the authors show that the best predictor of developing language pathology course is the task of retelling a story using pictures (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987).

The narration of a story differs from other forms of oral discourse by its structure. The structure of a story could be described on the micro-linguistic and macrolinguistic levels. The microlinguistic structure refers to phrases and sentences, as well as pronouns, conjunctions and other linguistic markers used for connecting parts of the discourse. Adequate use of these linguistic elements makes narration of a story cohesive (Liles, 1987). Macrolinguistic structure exceeds the level of the sentence. Some authors describe the macrolinguistic structure through episodes as logical units, among which time and cause and effect relations exist. When the narrator organizes episodes harmoniously, then they get coherent discourse understandable to the interlocutor (Stein & Glenn, 1975).

Assessment of narrative discourse is one of the most economical and the most interesting ways of collecting data on communication and language competence with children of typical development, as well as with the children with speech-language disorders of different etiology. In any case, it is important to know that this way of assessing language ability should be well structured, because otherwise validity and chance of analyzing such corpus of data could be questioned. It is considered that the Comic Story as a stimulus provides the synergy of structured circumstances and imaginative communication (Botting, 2002).

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The goal of this research is to establish characteristics of storytelling in preschool children through implementation of the Comic Story task. Regarding the goal of this research, the following tasks have been formulated:

1. Describing microlinguistic characteristics of storytelling in preschool children through:
 - length of the story;
 - type of the sentences used in storytelling;
 - types of connectives among the sentences in storytelling;
2. Describing macrolinguistic characteristics of storytelling in preschool children through:
 - frequency of formed episodes in the story (out of possible two),
 - frequency of story elements in the story (out of possible five);
 - independence in storytelling.

Sample

The research involved 60 children, out of which 29 (48%) girls and 31 (52%) boys, aged four (N=20), five (N=20), and six (N=20) years. Distribution of measures given on the sample shows that the children's age does not vary significantly from the normal distribution ($p > 0,05$) with values Skewness of 0,05 and Kurtosis of -1,23.

The research was realized during March 2019 in the scope of a preschool institution in Belgrade. The examinees were the children whose mother tongue was Serbian, with at least average intellectual skills, without the presence of sensory, motor and emotional disorders.

Instruments and Procedure

Characteristics of storytelling in children have been assessed on the Comic story task. Picture as a stimulus is a suitable instrument for examining speech and language skills at all ages. The Comic story as an instrument puts two tasks before a child: understanding and production. Besides talking about events given in the pictures, they are expected to understand each picture, as well as understand time and cause and consequence sequence of events. The oral statement given with the Comic story is more original than retelling, because it requires independent language formulation (Kostić, Vladislavljević & Popović, 1983).

The assessment of the macrolinguistic level of storytelling has been done according to the model of story analysis (Stein & Glenn, 1975). This model predicts two sections of each story: situation and episode(s). Situation has two functions in the story: to represent the main character and describe physical, social and time context in which the story happens. Stories in pictures often do not have this element emphasized, but even then the children feel the need to sort of present the main character or the place of the plot to us ("Once upon a time there was a little girl...", "A girl...", "She was looking through her bedroom window..." etc.). After describing the situation, i.e. the story's main character and ambience, follow(s) the episode(s) whose elements are related to time and cause and consequence relations. The story can contain one or more episodes. The episode elements are:

- *The introductory event.* The happening that becomes an introduction for the main character's acting in the story.
- *Reaction.* Psychological state of the character caused by happenings in the story. Reaction involves reflections and feelings of the main character about the introductory event or final outcome. This story element requires perspective-taking of the main character.
- *Internal plan.* Internal planning of activities is absent in the stories in which there is only one goal and when the goal is reached by simple activity (The story of the Snowman used in this research is

one of those stories, so this element of the story has not been analyzed).

- *Action*. An activity through which the main character reaches the goal.
- *Outcome*. This element of the story tells us that the main character has reached the goal and which events have directly led to its reaching/failure.

A Comic story can consist of several episodes. The system of episodes can be connected in different ways, and those are commonly time connected episodes (“And then...”) or cause (“Because...”, “Because of...”). According to Stein and Glenn (1975) the complete episode is considered to be the one containing at least three elements: the introductory event, activities leading to the goal and reaching/failure in the goal reaching. If one of these elements is missing, the episode is incomplete. If two elements are missing, it means that there is no episode.

Using four illustrated pictures that represent a story on the unfortunate destiny of the Snowman, the children were provided with structured visual stimulus and enough information for structuring a story. The children had a task to use the given information in order to form a story. Pictures in the story of the Snowman illustrate two episodes: the making of the Snowman and its melting in the hot sun. Most elements of both episodes are clearly visible in the pictures. Elements that are not supported by illustrations (finished Snowman as the outcome of the first episode; the sad character of the little girl watching the Snowman melt as a reaction to the outcome in the second episode) should have been evoked by the children themselves. Both episodes are connected by the time sequence of events: first, the Snowman was made, and then it melted in the sun. Structuring the story of the Snowman according to the model of story analysis was given in the Appendix.

The examination of the story’s macrostructure has been done in a way that the above mentioned elements of the story (situation, introductory event, activity, reactions, outcome) are analyzed in transcribed discourses. Besides the spontaneously produced statements, we have also taken into consideration the children’s replies to the questions of the examiner speech-therapist (“And then what?”, “What happened next?”). If the proposed question would contain allusions to the reply (“What did the boy see? How was the weather?”), such answers were not analyzed.

Besides the above mentioned elements in the storytelling, the analysis of macrolinguistic structure has also been done through:

- The number of episodes in the story as a categorical variable showing whether both episodes are present and whether they are complete or not.
- The number of stimulating questions referred to a child by the examiner speech therapist, described as the independence measure in the story formation.

The other aspect of this research is the microlinguistic organization of the story recognized through children's skills to use linguistic markers in cohesive discourse production. As cohesiveness measures in this research, we have taken into consideration the following:

- Kinds of connectives among sentences made by conjunctions, such as: coordinating, temporal, causal and exclusive. Every discourse has been analyzed to see which type of sentence is dominant. If two or more connectives are equally present, the more complex one was analyzed.
- Length of the story as indicator of the number of communicative sentences necessary to form the story. Each discourse has been divided into simple, extended and compound sentences. Subordinate clauses, i.e. the clauses having made a complex syntactic structure, have been analyzed as a whole along with independent sentences that that make a communicative whole with. Unfinished/interrupted sentences have been taken into consideration, as well as those having been produced after questions of examiner speech-therapist.
- Types of sentences as indicators of complexity of syntactic discourse organization. This categorical variable has been described through four categories: simple, extended and compound sentences (parataxis and subordinate clauses).

Examination Procedure

Illustrated Comic story implemented for the needs of this research has been presented to children in A4 paper with the following instructions: *“Now you can tell me a story about the Snowman. These pictures will help you with it. Follow then in this order, from the first to the last and tell me what happened to the Snowman.”*

Statement of each child has been recorded and transcribed. Additional questions proposed to them varied from weakly structured (for example *“And then what?”*) to those highly structured (for example *“Why is the Snowman melting?”*, *“How is the weather outside?”*), which have been proposed when the children would make longer pauses, have problems with storytelling initiation and disorganization (*“One day...in the morning the boy woke up and saw that the Snowman melted away”*). Every child was individually questioned in a separate room.

Statistical Data Processing

For the purpose of statistical data processing we have used measures of descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, standard deviation, correlation) and inferential statistics (ANOVA – analysis of variance). Data analysis has been done with statistical package SPSS 20.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Macrostructure of the Story

Achievements of children from three age groups with the Comic story task have been shown in the Chart 1.

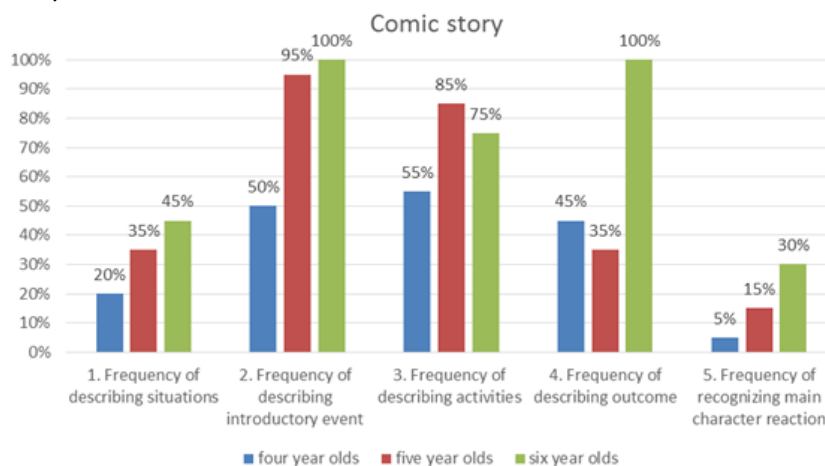


Chart 1. Achievement of children at the Comic story task

The Chart 1 shows frequency of children at different age at tasks: description of the situation shown in the picture, description of the introductory event in the story, description of activities leading to the goal, description of outcomes in the story and recognizing reactions of the main character in the story.

The description of the characters and the environment in which the story takes place is present in storytelling in a little over 30% children from the sample. Among the four-year-olds, 20% describe the situation and make the introduction for the plot in that manner. The same is done by 35% of five-year-olds and 45% of six-year-olds. Although there is tendency of a bigger review of the characters and ambience in storytelling in older children, it has not been shown as statistically significant ($F=3,07$; $df=1$; $p=0,08$).

By the analysis of the frequency of describing the introductory event, it has been established that among the four-year-olds there is an equal number of those who designate and do not designate the introductory event in the story, as 95% of five-year-olds turn to the introductory event in the story, as well as 100% of six-year-olds. Statistically significant influence of children's age on frequency of designating introductory event has been established ($F=54,50$; $df=39$; $p=0,01$). Research results have shown that four-year-olds statistically significantly less describe the

introductory event at the Comic story task in comparison to five-year-olds ($p < 0,05$) and six-year-olds ($p < 0,05$).

When it comes to the description of activities leading towards the goal, the research results show that six-year-olds do that in 75% of cases, and five-year-olds in 85% of cases. Among the four-year-olds, 55% of them describe this element in story. The statistical significance on the connection of age and describing activities leading to the goal in children's storytelling has not been established ($F = 0,06$; $df = 1$; $p = 0,81$).

Describing event outcome in the Comic story has been established with all six-year-olds in our sample of children (100%), 35% of five-year-olds and 45% of four-year-olds. The given results show statistically significant influence of children's age on frequency of describing event outcome ($F = 24,29$; $df = 57$; $p = 0,01$). Given results show that six-year-olds statistically significantly more commonly describe the event outcome at the Comic story task in comparison to five-year-olds ($p < 0,05$) and four-year-olds ($p < 0,05$).

The smallest success at the Comic story task was achieved by children during the assessment of successfulness in describing emotional reactions of the main character to the events in the story. This element is mostly absent at all three age groups and it has been established with 16.7% children from the sample. Only 5% of four-year-olds, 15% of five-year-olds and 30% of six-year-olds turn to the emotional state of the main character. Statistically significant difference among the three age groups in terms of describing reactions of the main character has not been established ($F = 3,68$; $df = 1$; $p = 0,06$).

Table 1 shows achievements of the children at three age groups at completing the episode task in the scope of the Comic story.

Table 1. The number of episodes in children's discourse at the Comic story task

Age groups	Number of episodes				
	Both episodes	Complete and incomplete	Both incomplete	One incomplete	None
Four-year-olds	5%	0%	25%	40%	30%
Five-year-olds	5%	10%	25%	60%	0%
Six-year-olds	20%	25%	40%	10%	5%
Total	10%	11,7%	30%	36,7%	11,7%

The given results show that, on the total sample, a small percent of children (10%) manage to describe both episodes through a series of situational pictures. It was mostly about children's discourses containing one incomplete episode (36,7%).

As 20% of six-year-olds manage to complete both episodes shown in the Comic story, 40% of them form two episodes, both of which are

incomplete. Five-year-olds (60%) have barely one incomplete episode. The greatest number of four-year-olds also has barely one incomplete episode or none. The difference between these two groups is that the younger group has 30% of children whose discourse does not contain any episode during story structuring, whereas among the five-year-olds there are no children who have not managed to make at least an incomplete episode.

In order to assess independence of children at the Comic story task, correlation analysis has been applied. Results indicate that there is a moderate correlation between the children's age and the number of questions proposed by the examiner speech-therapist as aid for them to complete the story. As children in our sample were older, the number of proposed questions by examiner-speech therapist was lower ($r=-0,47$; $p<0,05$). On average, one question needed to be posed with six-year-olds ($AS=0,85$), two questions with five-year-olds ($AS=2,20$), and three questions with four-year-olds ($AS=2,95$) during this task.

Microstructure of the Story

The length of the children's stories has been shown through the number of sentences produced during storytelling. Both the sentences that were spontaneously produced, as well as those caused by questions of examiner-speech therapist have been analysed. In order to assess the influence of children's age on the discourse length, ANOVA (analysis of variance) has been applied. The difference in average length of discourse among four-year-olds ($AS=5,05$; $SD=1,15$), five-year-olds ($AS=4,85$; $SD=1,23$) and six-year-olds ($AS=4,45$; $SD=1,10$) has not been found as statistically significant ($F= 1,39$; $df=2$; $p>0,05$).

In Table 2 results of average number of words in children's storytelling at three age groups has been shown.

Table 2. Average number of words in children's storytelling at three age groups

Children's age	N	AS	SD
Four-year-olds	20	15	5,10
Five-year-olds	20	22	6,02
Six-year-olds	20	27	4,59

When it comes to lexical-semantic level of development, the results of the research show that there is a statistically significant difference in the overall number of words at the Comic story task among different age groups ($F=24,87$; $df=2$; $p=0,01$; $\eta^2=0,47$). Analysing the given results, we have established that the older children produce much more words in storytelling than the younger children, whereby the age explains 47% of variance in children's achievements at this task. Additional tests

have established that among all groups of children there is a significant difference in the total number of produced words, so the production of the total number of words with six-year-olds ($p < 0,05$) is statistically significantly higher than the one we find at five-year-olds ($p < 0,05$) and four-year-olds ($p < 0,05$). Significant differences have been established among five-year-olds and four-year-olds as well, provided that four-year-olds have the smallest total number of produced words in comparison to other two groups of children.

The analysis of lexicon extent gives identical pattern of results like one in the case of lexical productivity. According to research results, age is found to be a significant factor of increase in lexicon extent, which can explain about 34% of variance in the number of content words produced by children at the Comic story task ($F=14,63$; $df=2$; $p=0,01$; $\eta^2=0,34$). Additional tests have shown that statistically significant difference is given in lexicon extent when the four-year-olds are compared to five-year-olds ($p < 0,05$) and six-year-olds ($p < 0,05$), in favor of the older children. Statistically significant differences in lexicon extent have not been established when achievements of five-year-olds and six-year-olds in production of content words are compared ($p > 0,05$). Chart 2 shows the analysis of the types of sentences produced by children at the Comic story task.

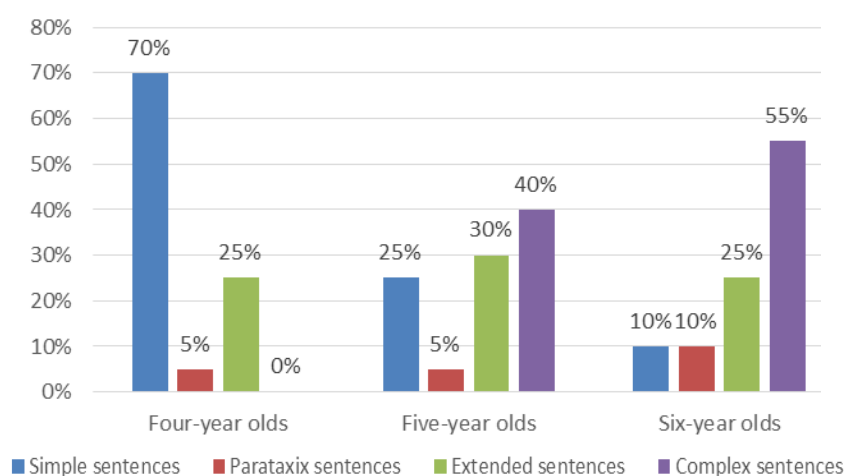


Chart 2. Frequency of different types of sentences in children's storytelling

The analysis of the type of sentences used by children in storytelling had a task to establish syntactic complexity, where production of compound (complex and parataxis) sentences would mark syntactically more complex production with regard to the discourse in which simple (predicate and extended) sentences dominate. Results of assessing frequency of different types of sentences in children's stories have shown

that storytelling with the major number of children consists of simple sentences (35%), as there is the smallest number of children whose storytelling contains complex sentences (6,7%). In the group of four-year-olds it has been established that 70% of children use simple sentences in storytelling, as none of the children uses complex sentences. Among five-year-olds, 40% of them use complex sentences, as 30% of children use extended sentences. When it comes to six-year-olds, 55% of them use complex sentences in the Comic story task, as 25% of children use extended sentences at this age. Statistically significant connection has been established between the age and the types of sentences used by children at the Comic story task ($F=9,42$; $df=56$; $p=0,01$). Namely, the research results have shown that four-year-olds use statistically significantly less complex sentences in storytelling than five-year-olds ($p<0,05$) and six-year-olds ($p<0,05$).

Chart 3 shows assessment results of the types of connectives between sentences in children's storytelling at three age groups.

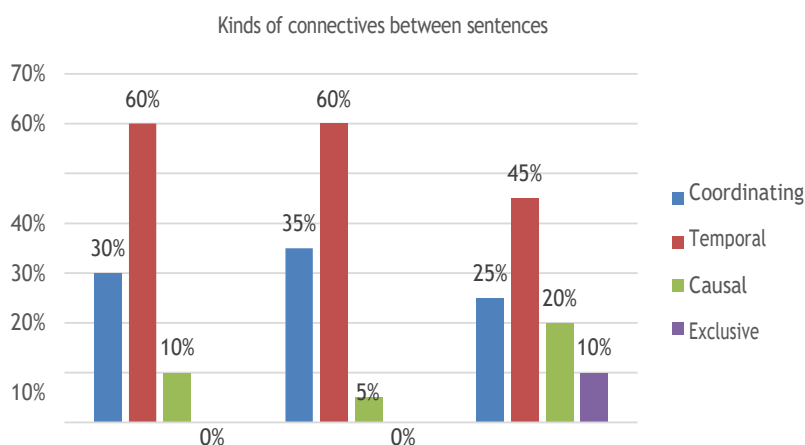


Chart 3. Types of connectives between sentences at the Comic story task

Connectives between sentences in 55% children of all ages have been achieved by linguistic markers (conjunctions) which have been indicating time connectives between sentence structures. Right after temporal connectives, there are coordinating connectives, which are used by 30% of children. The least used are exclusive connectives between sentences (3,3%) and only in the group of six-year-olds. Causal connectives, although present at all ages, are most common among six-year-olds, so 57% of the total number is in this age group. Statistically significant difference between three age groups of children regarding the types of sentence connectives has not been established ($F=1,74$; $df=3$; $p=0,17$).

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was to establish the characteristics of storytelling with preschool children at the macro and microlinguistic plans.

Four-year-olds

The implementation of story analysis model describing the macrolinguistic structure of storytelling has shown that four-year-olds, in the majority of cases, more often describe events given in the picture than a Comic story with introduction, activity focused on the goal and outcome of the activity.

Taking into account that the macrolinguistic level of story organization requires the knowledge of the story scheme, it can be concluded that with four-year-olds this scheme is mostly absent, which is the reason why children do not make a difference between simple description of events and story structuring (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991). Consequence of this is that 80% of four-year-olds in this discourse have not turned to the ambience of the story, nor did they find it important to show the hero of the Comic story as the main character. The focus of storytelling in four-year-olds was on describing the introductory event and activities leading to the goal. 55% of children have not mentioned the outcome; emotional reactions of the main character have been described by only 5% of four-year-olds. Non-independence in storytelling evident during examination is statistically significant. Not only did four-year-olds need follow-up questions in order to help them complete the story, but the number of those questions was statistically significantly higher than with older children. In this group, there were children who needed only one or two questions, but there were also children who could produce only one sentence by themselves.

It can be concluded, at the microlinguistic plan that storytelling in four-year-olds predominantly contains simple sentences, and that complex sentences were rarely used. The sentences have been mostly connected in a way that time course of events in the story can be guessed from their connectives. Coordinating connectives between sentences have also been common and they match the tendency of children to describe events, before they structure a story. The number of sentences necessary to complete a story was five sentences in average. In the context of independence in story structuring in this group of children, it becomes clear that the majority of produced sentences has been stimulated by examiner speech-therapist's questions.

Five-year-olds

Among five-year-olds only 15% of them manage to complete one (10%) or two episodes (5%) of the Comic story. If we take forming of at

least one complete episode in the story as measure of narrative coherence, then it becomes clear that coherence of the Comic Story is a demanding task for five-year-olds, but with tendency of success increase at this task in comparison to four-year-olds, where coherent storytelling is managed to be produced only in 5% of cases.

The trend of omitting description of ambience of the plot and the main characters continues in this age group as well. The percentage of children describing this element does not exceed 35%. Just like four-year-olds, the five-year-olds also focus their story on the introductory event and activities leading to the goal. Still, five-year-olds are much more consistent in the description of these elements, so the percentage of missing elements is negligible. The outcome of the story and reactions of the main character in this age group are also more absent than present. Five-year-olds have not shown any special independence in story structuring, as the questions for discourse development have been necessary for this group of children as well.

Microlinguistically analyzed, extended and complex syntactic structures dominate in storytelling in five-year-olds. Dominance of temporal and coordinating sentence connectives opposite causal and exclusive sentence connectives show that the describing of pictures, rather than story structuring is dominant in this age group.

Six-year-olds

In comparison to two other groups of children, six-year-olds have shown significantly better results in the macrolinguistic organization of the story, and even 45% of them managed to complete one (25%) or two episodes (20%). It is significant that among this group of children there has been frequent recognition of both episodes in the story (40%), although they have problems in completing them. Four-year-olds and five-year-olds, unlike them, have rarely recognized both episodes.

The fact that the story scheme exists on the cognitive level in this group of children has also been supported by the fact that episode elements (introductory event, activities leading to the goal and outcome) have been consistently described in a little less than half of children. Besides, description of the plot situation (characters and ambience) become more frequent and present in 45% of six-year-olds, which is another confirmation that it is the story structuring, not pictures describing.

The group of six-year-olds is the only one in which we have noticed significant independence at the Comic story task. Only one question was enough to a few of the children to complete the Comic story, and it is important to mention that not many variations have been established in these results, unlike the other two groups of children.

On the microlinguistic plan, the complexification of the linguistic units used in story structuring has been established. The average number

of sentences in the Comic story is a little lower than in the last two groups of children and it reflects the tendency of using compound sentences (parataxis and subordinate clauses). Connectives between sentences are arranged more correctly, and although temporal connectives are dominant in this group, causal connectives are more frequent, and exclusive ones appear for the first time.

Our results are in accordance with researches which show that children's storytelling is gradually developed during preschool years, showing more and more semantic complexity and diversity (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Minami, 1996). From the age of four, children's storytelling often consist of two or more events, provided that children produce them without paying attention to time sequence. The sentences produced by four-year-olds in storytelling often make sense only as individual elements of events, but they are not mutually adequately connected to form a story with all elements (Trabasso, Stein, Rodkin, Munger & Baughn, 1991).

On the other hand, five-year-olds rarely have trouble with following time sequence during storytelling. However, with this group of children storytelling often ends too early, keeping on the element they find the most important in the scope of the Comic story. Development changes in sentence formulation could be an indicator of syntactic complexity. Researches show that the children at the age of four and five start to produce adverb clauses, that is sentences, as well as the sentences inserted between parts of other sentences (Miller, 1981; Wells, 1985).

Finally, storytelling in six-year-olds is regularly structured, refers the interlocutor on "who, where and what happened" and then events in the Comic story continue to resolve with an appropriate conclusion. If a four-year-old never connects two events in the storytelling, and if a six-year-old has trouble with the time sequence, there could be a reason for timely assessment of this ability (McCabe & Rosenthal, 1994; Peterson & McCabe, 1983).

CONCLUSION

Looking at the difference in storytelling between four-year-olds, five-year-olds and six-year-olds, it is apparent that the big distinction between the three age groups occurs in the storytelling setting. Putting these results together suggests that at the age of 4 children know how to describe an introductory event, situations and activities leading to a goal in a story. At the age of 5 they are also focused on the introductory event and activities leading to the goal, but with more consistency and smaller percentage of missing elements. On the other hand, at the age of 6, in a little less than half of the children, a complete story scheme exists on a

cognitive level with a description of the introductory event, activities leading to the goal and outcome.

Development changes in sentences formulation can be an indicator of syntactic complexity and cognitive development. Storytelling in children is gradually developed during preschool years. As narration of stories enables the experts to collect a lot of linguistic data, this work represents an attempt to use a number of data given during assessment in order to select elements at the macrolinguistic and microlinguistic plans, and use their analyses in order to get an insight into the characteristics of narration of stories in preschool children.

Research of storytelling has a series of practical implications. Besides personal experiences, a significant part of narrative discourse with preschool children make the stories they make up in play and/or when they are induced by questions. Retelling personal experiences in comparison to stories that children make up results in more complete, more detailed and more organized discourse. This dissociation speaks in favor of the fact that the content they talk about has a great influence on the organization and structure of narrative discourse with children (Allen, Kertoy, Sherblom & Pettit, 1994). For structuring narrative discourse, it is very important to understand its communicative aspect. When the interlocutor has access to all or majority of information that are relevant, we can conclude that narrative discourse of the child is complete. The four-year-olds recognize that description of characters and places of the plot in a story is the way to give the interlocutor information that will help them understand the structure of discourse (Trabasso & Nickels, 1992).

In order to improve the literacy of all children, different pedagogical strategies need to be employed. Using storytelling is one way to address literacy development by improving oral language, reading comprehension, and writing. Because of the interrelated nature of the processes involved in reading and writing, storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy that can be woven into instruction to increase children's competencies in all areas (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

The promotion of storytelling is an important consideration for preschool program planners. Sometimes, storytelling may be neglected in preschool programs because of a variety of reasons, including not being able to hold children's attention. Teachers can increase children's skills in many ways. For example, teachers may start storytelling by relating short, significant happenings from daily life. As children listen to the teacher's storytelling, they notice beginnings, middles and story endings. They imitate techniques using hand and body gesturing, facial expression, and vocal variation; they may even copy dramatic pause. One benefit that is fostered by storytelling is child story making. Other possible child competencies and understandings promoted by storytelling experiences in-

clude developing a sense of oral power and group inclusion (Machado, 2013).

Adults literally teach their children about beginnings, middles and endings by structuring their own narratives in an organized way (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 2000). Sharing oral stories and verbally putting daily happenings into words can be cherished for what they are - the building blocks of thinking and imagining, describing, creating, expressing ideas, and later achieving writing and reading skill (Gallas, 2003).

Through storytelling, ideas and new words are grasped quickly and easily. Storytelling may occur at almost any time during the course of the day, inside or outside. No books are necessary, but their use may focus child's attention. A picture book is the source for storytelling. Used this way, storytelling motivates interest in books. Encouraging young children to tell their stories while using pictures, photographs, or other visuals, stimulates both creative thinking and visual literacy skills.

Storytelling is an excellent way to develop speech and language in children. Children's sense of "story creator" is often incorporated into their self-concept. In preschool, it is a good idea to offer activities in which pictures are used as motivators for storytelling. Children's attempts for creating stories should not be criticized, but simply accepted. Their first storytelling attempts often lack sequence, have unclear plots, and involve long, disconnected events. As children mature and are exposed to stories, their abilities improve. The goal is to encourage a love for and positive attitude toward oral storytelling (Mathias, 2006).

The author points out that storytelling goals include: a) increasing children's enjoyment of oral language; b) making young children familiar with oral storytelling; c) increasing children's vocabulary; d) increasing children's confidence as speakers; e) increasing children's awareness of story sequence and structure; f) increasing children's story comprehension and higher level thinking skills; g) promoting oral skill, use, and expression of ideas; h) helping children gain listening skills and stimulating stimulating listener's imagination; i) extending young children's knowledge of facts and fantasy (Mathias, 2006).

Current studies encourage teachers to promote each child's oral development. Experts believe that this kind of activity primes children's inner feelings and thinking processes, and increases self-awareness and awareness of self in relation to others. It is a powerful language development approach. As many researchers are now recognizing storytelling as an effective strategy for literacy development, some have considered the needs of teachers in preparing to use this strategy by providing techniques for implementing storytelling into their practice. Choosing appropriate stories, concern about their ability to effectively tell a story, and the need to understand the purpose of storytelling in education were found to be the greatest areas of need (Agosto, 2016; Makin & Whitehead, 2004).

Many research provides illustrations of utilising storytelling as the cornerstone of an early childhood program. For many years storytelling has been forgotten in many educational environments, as our world of visual images has rapidly flourished. By granting storytelling an essential role in the education of young children, their imagination will be inspired as they create their own visual images and ideas; their minds will be challenged; and their language skills will be further cultivated, as they are inspired to experience and explore all language forms (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Young children will also develop closer relationships and a sense of community, through the intrinsically social experience of storytelling (Phillips, 2000).

Instructions for storytelling is important for all young children, and particularly those at risk for or with language learning impairments. The primary aim of the instruction is to maximize children's receptive and expressive narration skills. Narrative development needs to begin early in the preschool period to prepare children for literacy instruction and access to the educational curriculum. For example, the written texts used in first grade for beginning reading instruction are in the narrative discourse genre and contain simple, chronologically ordered events that are linked to one another by causal and temporal connectors. Promoting narrative development, however, is not confined to young children. Older children, particularly those with communication impairments, may be functioning developmentally in the emergent literacy stage and require intervention aimed at establishing and solidifying early developing narrative comprehension and production skills.

Storytelling instruction and intervention are informed by several "best-practice" principles and guidelines (Roth, 2009):

1. *Implement and embed strategies in natural, authentic environments and interactive activities, including preschool curriculum.* Young children learn best through active exploration, meaningful experiences, and interactive participation with materials that sustain their interest. They benefit from regular opportunities to talk about what is done; active use of their narrative knowledge helps them transfer what they know to new situations. This is especially important for young children, who need to be engaged in experiences that make narration meaningful and which build on prior learning (i.e. what children already know and can do).
2. *Expose children to developmentally appropriate literature with respect to both content and complexity.* For example, children under the age of 5 years benefit most from simple linear stories that follow the activities of one main character over time, whereas older children can follow the simultaneous actions of two main characters.

3. *Consider the emotional content of books.* Five-year-old children differentiate between positive and negative emotions such as happiness and sadness, respectively, but cannot yet recognize the emotions of others, especially when the feelings are different from their own. They also have difficulty integrating more than one emotion at a time. Many books for young children, however, do not explicitly state characters' emotions, assuming that youngsters will recognize the emotion portrayed based on the situation or attributes of the character. Rather, books should be selected that make emotions explicit throughout the story line.
4. *Use discourse hierarchies.* This organizational approach involves progressing from simple to more complex genres. It also includes a gradual increase in the length of narratives introduced, addition of more actions and participants into narrative sequences, increasing the displacement of narratives in time and location, and gradually introducing mental states and motivations of characters (Norris & Hoffman, 1990).
5. *Use recounts of true, familiar events.* As children become more comfortable with the event sequence, scaffold the youngsters to gradually take over parts of the narrative, and then encourage elaboration (e.g. include new incidents, add other characters).
6. *Introduce a variety of narrative genres, including fictional and informational books.* Different genres stimulate conversations about different ideas and concepts beyond everyday experiences. Genres provide interesting and diverse content to talk and think about, increasing children's funds of background world knowledge.
7. *Choose stories that maintain interesting language patterns, a sense of cadence, and rhyme and alliterative sequences.* Sound patterns rather than words may attract and sustain children's attention to the printed page.
8. *Read aloud to children on a daily basis using shared book reading.* These reading strategies promote the development of story knowledge. It is through repeated exposure to stories that children begin to internalize a framework for understanding and generating narrative sequences (Westby, 1991).
9. *Embed vocabulary instruction in narrative activities.* The narrative context provides natural opportunities to introduce new vocabulary words and strengthen familiar lexical items (e.g. Akhtar, Jipson, & Callanan, 2001; Tabors, Beals, & Weizman, 2001). This strategy can be particularly beneficial for young children who have difficulty learning new words and retaining the meaning of newly learned words.

10. *Select stories with well-developed plot structures.* Such stories have logical event sequences that culminate in a clear resolution. This type of literature can be used to introduce and reinforce the traditional concept of “story”; that is, a story has beginning, middle, and end portions with logically connected event sequences.
11. *Use predictable pattern books.* The repetitive themes in these stories foster both comprehension and apprehension skills. Comprehension involves understanding what you have just heard; apprehension entails predicting what’s coming next.
12. *Direct children’s attention to the printed word rather than just pictures.* This strategy supports the connection between spoken words and print forms.
13. *Engage in storytelling in addition to story reading.* Storytelling brings children into the act of story making, thereby permitting the creation of stories *with* children, not just *for* or *to* children (Trousdale, 1990).
14. *Engage in repeated storytellings rather than single readings of different books.* This rereading strategy increases participation, language output, and quality of contribution (National Reading Panel, 2000).
15. *Choose the appropriate reading style.* Different styles are more conducive to different language levels. For example, children with strong receptive vocabularies benefit from a higher demanding “performance-oriented” style, in which the reader provides plentiful commentary before and after an uninterrupted story reading. Children with sparser receptive vocabularies profit from a “describer style,” a less demanding mode that involves labeling and describing pictures during book sharing.
16. *Use a variety of scaffolding techniques to provide children with predictable verbal and nonverbal narrative language and instructional feedback.* One specific example is PEER. PEER is based on Ninio and Bruner’s (1978) storybook reading routine and involves the following sequence of activities: P = Parent/adult initiates exchange about book; E = Evaluates child’s response; E = Expands child’s response; R = Repeats initial question to check comprehension.
17. *Provide specific suggestions to parents and other family members.* Sharing information with parents and caregivers can reinforce adult–child interactions and offer school-based professionals opportunities to scaffold these interactions.

The three-stage instructional model of Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) is ideal for narrative intervention with young children. The three stages include (1) explicit instruction, during which models of correct

performance are provided, elicited, and reinforced; (2) guided practice, where children try out their newly learned behaviors with scaffolding from an adult (e.g., teacher, SLP, parent); and (3) independent practice, during which children work on their own.

More needs to be done with the issue of when children begin to know that a good story includes a conflict or problem, and how this interacts with models of narration abilities development. Similarly, we need more research on the kinds of supports that help children in this area.

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APPENDIX

Structure of the story about the Snowman formed according to the model of analysed story

<i>Story structure</i>	<i>The first episode</i>	<i>The second episode</i>
<i>Situation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Once upon a time there was a little girl ▪ She was in her bedroom 	
<i>Episode</i>		
<i>Introductory event</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She looked through the window ▪ She saw it was snowing outside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She saw the sun was shining outside ▪ She woke up ▪ She wanted to see what had happened to the Snowman
<i>Reaction to introductory event</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She was happy for that. ▪ She wanted to play in the snow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Snowman was sad
<i>Activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She went out ▪ She got dressed ▪ She started to make a Snowman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She got out of bed ▪ She looked through the window
<i>Outcome</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Her dad and brother/family/friends helped her make a Snowman ▪ The Snowman was made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She saw that the Snowman was melting because of hot sun
<i>Reactions to outcome</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She was happy for that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ She was sad for that

Note: The Appendix contains examples of transcribed statement that could be coded as elements of the Comic Story analysis. Both episodes begin in the girl’s bedroom, which is the reason why the situation as element of the story was not emphasized in the second episode

НАРАТИВНА КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТ: ПРЕЛИМИНАРНА СТУДИЈА ПРИПОВЕДАЊА ПРИЧЕ КОД ДЕЦЕ ПРЕДШКОЛСКОГ УЗРАСТА

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Резиме

Структура наративног дискурса може се описати на микролингвистичком и макролингвистичком плану. Микролингвистичка структура се описује кроз синтагме и реченице којима се прича реализује, као и заменице, везнике и друге лингвистичке маркере којима се делови приче повезују. Адекватна употреба ових лингвистичких елемената чини испричану причу кохезивном. Макролингвистичка структура превазилази ниво реченице. Неки аутори макролингвистичку структуру приказују кроз епизоде као логичке јединице, међу којима постоје временски и узрочно-последични односи.

Циљ овог истраживања је био да се од мноштва података добијених проценом наративног дискурса издвоје елементи на макролингвистичком и микролингвистичком плану и њиховом анализом добије увид у карактеристике приповедања приче код деце предшколског узраста. Истраживањем је обухваћено 60 деце, од чега 29 (48%) девојчица и 31 (52%) дечак. Узорак истраживања чинила су деца узраста од четири, пет и шест година. Карактеристике приповедања приче на макролингвистичком и микролингвистичком плану процењене су применом задатка Стрип прича (Костић, Владисављевић & Поповић, 1983).

Резултати анализе структуре приче на макролингвистичком плану су показали да је фокус код четворогодишњака и петогодишњака на описивању уводног догађаја и активности које воде ка циљу. Обе групе деце нису показале изразиту самосталност у структурирању приче, будући да су била неопходна питања од стране испитивача која би подстакла развој дискурса. Насупрот томе, код шестогодишње деце образац приче постоји на сазнајном нивоу, с обзиром да су елементи приче доследно описани код већег броја деце. Резултати корелационе анализе су показали да постоји статистички значајна негативна корелација између узраста деце и броја питања које испитивач поставља као помоћ деци да допуне причу ($r=-0,47$; $p<0,05$).

Анализом резултата микролингвистичке структуре приче утврђено је да приче четворогодишњака предоминантно садрже просте реченице, док просто-проширене и зависно-сложене синтаксичке конструкције доминирају у наративном дискурсу петогодишњака. За разлику од њих, у групи шестогодишњака је присутна тенденција коришћења сложених (напоредних, зависних) реченица. Када су у питању лексичко-семантичке способности, резултати указују на статистички значајне разлике у укупном броју речи које деца продукују на задатку приповедања приче у корист старије деце, при чему се узрастом објашњава 47%

варијансе постигнућа на овом задатку ($F=24,87$; $df=2$; $p=0,01$; $\eta^2=0,47$). Приповедање приче код деце постепено се развија током предшколског периода, а савети о подстицају развоја ове способности су важни за сву децу, посебно за децу са присуством ризико-фактора на рођењу или децу са дефицитима у развоју говора и језика.