

## PREFACE

The overwhelming majority of research carried out in child language development has dealt with the acquisition of English as a first language. Research into other languages was commenced somewhat later, and it was given an impetus by the search of universals in the process of language acquisition. The question posed to crosslinguistic research comes down to the following: does a universal sequence of language acquisition exist? What is universal and language-specific in language development? (Slobin 1973, 1985). A wealthy body of data has been collected from a number of languages, the Indo-European family in the first place. These include the Romance languages (Italian, Spanish, French), the Germanic languages (German, English, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, Norwegian), the Slavic languages (Russian, Czech, Polish), the Baltic (Latvian), the Semitic (Hebrew), the Finno-Ugric languages (Hungarian, Estonian, Finnish), and others.

There has been no systematic research into Lithuanian child language acquisition. Thus the present study is the very first to give a description of the acquisition of Lithuanian noun morphology.<sup>1</sup> The research was commenced by taking part in the international project 'Crosslinguistic Project on Pre- and Protomorphology in Language Acquisition' supervised by Wolfgang U. Dressler. The project has initiated systematic research into Lithuanian language, as well as other languages, such as Ukrainian, Croatian, Slovene, Dutch, Basque, and Georgian. These languages were included in addition to Russian, Polish, German, French, Greek, Turkish, Arabic and others; at present, the project embraces more than 20 languages.

The aim of this study is to describe when and how a particular grammatical category of noun emerges in the speech of a Lithuanian child. It also aims at providing an interpretation of 'errors' (i.e., a linguistic behaviour which does not match the model of adult language) and suggest-

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<sup>1</sup> The acquisition of verb morphology in Lithuanian is analysed by Paweł Wójcik (2000), who also participates in the international project 'Crosslinguistic Project on Pre- and Protomorphology in Language Acquisition' (Warsaw University, Department of General and Baltic Philology).

ing reasons due to which such errors occur. Moreover, the results obtained from our analysis will be tested against crosslinguistic data.

We expect this study to serve practical purposes as well. This belief rests on the assumption that the description of how different linguistic phenomena (pertaining to different levels of language) are acquired allows us to detect developmental norms existing in a particular language. These norms, in turn, might help to recognise the defects occurring in child language. Thus, such descriptions might be useful for psychologists, speech therapists, pre- and primary schoolteachers.

The study is structured as follows. In addition to the preface, there are six chapters devoted to the actual analysis of the corpus of data. The first, introductory chapter, contains the description of data, research methods, and the theoretical approach of the study. The second chapter focuses on the acquisition of diminutives; chapter 3 deals with the acquisition of the category of number. The fourth chapter provides a description of the acquisition of case, and the fifth explores the acquisition of the declensional system of nouns. Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of self-reference items, and it also includes some remarks about the acquisition of personal pronouns. The last, concluding chapter, summarises the principal findings of the study.

The study is supplemented by a joint eighth chapter by myself, Sabine Klampfer, Katharina Korecky-Kröll and Wolfgang U. Drssler, which compares Lithuanian with German acquisition of noun morphology and uses a new comparative measure that gives new evidence for basic project hypotheses.