

WOLFGANG U. DRESSLER

PRESENTATION

After “Studies in Pre- and Protomorphology” (Dressler 1997) we here present a second volume which has come out of the international “Crosslinguistic Project on Pre- and Protomorphology in Language Acquisition” sponsored and partially financed by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, in part also funded by the Austrian “Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung” (projects P 10250-SPR and P 13681-SPR). Other volumes resulting from this project are Dziubalska-Kołodziejczyk (1997), Gillis (1998), Bittner, Dressler & Kilani-Schoch (2000), published elsewhere, as well as Voelikova & Dressler (in print) and Bittner, Dressler & Kilani-Schoch (in print).

The main aim is a comparative crosslinguistic investigation of the first phases of the acquisition of morphology. For this purpose we have started in 1993 to develop a programme for theory-guided research which consists in parallel longitudinal data collection with children from about 1;4 to at least 3;0, and in identical methods of transcription, morphological coding and analysis within nearly two dozen languages. Evidently, the pace of realisation of this programme differs from one language to another.

Progress is particularly great with Lithuanian. As counterpart to Wójcik’s (2000) monograph on Lithuanian verb morphology we here present the pioneering monograph by Ineta Savickienė on the acquisition of noun morphology. Both works are based on the rich longitudinal data collected from the Lithuanian girl Rūta. The publication of these two monographs results in a total reversal of the state of the art in Lithuanian child-language studies: from the total absence of systematic research on the acquisition of Lithuanian in the 20th century, Lithuanian is at the beginning of the new millennium one of the languages where acquisition of morphology is best documented and analysed.

This is not only a feat in itself, which will benefit theoretical research and applications in mother-tongue instruction, second-language acquisition and help for linguistically handicapped children in the republic of Lithuania, just a decade after regained independence. But it is also a

memorable achievement within the international perspective and from a comparative point of view: Lithuanian is, at least in the realm of morphology, the most conservative of all living Indo-European languages, the one with the richest and most complex inflectional morphology. Also diminutive formation (the other topic of this monograph) is very rich in types and the richest in tokens among all European languages (even more than Dutch). Thus acquisition of its morphology is of particular interest.

So far acquisition of its closest cognate language, Latvian, had been much better described (cf. Rūķe-Draviņa 1973, 1982, 1993). Now, with this Savickienė's and Wójcik's (2000) monographs, Lithuanian child morphology has become the much better described of the two Baltic languages. Even work on the less closely related Slavic languages is surpassed by these two monographs.

Savickienė's monograph is a thoroughly reworked and adapted English version of her Lithuanian PhD thesis "Lietuvio vaiko daiktavardžio morfologija" (The acquisition of noun morphology in Lithuanian). Moreover a joint chapter (by Ineta Savickienė, Sabine Klampfer & Katharina Korecky-Kröl & Wolfgang U. Dressler) which compares Lithuanian with Austrian German has been added. It shows the interest of contrasting the acquisition of two distantly cognate and typologically very different morphologies and applies innovative methodology. Thus this monograph has become very much in line with the present state of the art of the international project which has supported Ineta Savickienė's work.