

Acquisition of demonstratives by a Russian-speaking child

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In our study we have analysed the speech of 14 Russian-speaking children aged 1;3-4 years (7 girls and 7 boys). Only longitudinal studies data were used.

First demonstratives appear in the speech of children at the age of about 1;5. Those are locative pronominal adverbs *tam* ('there') and *zdes'* ('here'). The next demonstrative, *etot* ('this') appears only at 1;8 and is the first changeable demonstrative the child is capable of.

The main function of the demonstratives in children's speech is deictic, which is used when the demonstrative is connected directly to the object of the world. Another core function of the demonstratives, anaphoric, is marginal for children. Adults use demonstratives in deictic and anaphoric functions equally often, but children have about 80% of deictic and only 4% of anaphoric contexts. The anaphoric function, in which the demonstrative refers to the some part of the text, appears with demonstratives at 2;5, though it is used irregularly and becomes more prominent only after 3 years. An explanation for this lies in the field of narrative deixis: children don't need anaphora, if they refer only to the situations around the deictic centre (I, here, now), and references to the non-observable situations cause the use of anaphora. Nevertheless, children start using anaphora earlier (2;0-2;1) with personal pronoun *on* ('he').

The cataphoric function takes place in subordinate clauses and is possible for those children, who are capable of producing complicated constructions, and is thus connected to the syntax development. Demonstratives *takoj* ('such', a pronominal adjective) and *tak* ('so', a pronominal adverb), besides standard functions, have a set of specific functions, which includes for example a searching, a classifying and an emphatic ones. The pronouns in the searching function are very frequent among children and replace the names of objects or characteristics the child is not aware or not sure of, or when children cannot quickly extract the necessary word from their mental lexicon.

The deictic proximity opposition is considered to form the core of the meaning of most demonstratives. *Zdes'* ('here') and *tam* ('there') mean "close to the reference point" and "far from the reference point". *Etot* ('this') and *tot* ('that') mean "being close/near" and "being far". In the locative adverbs this opposition is acquired easily: *zdes'* appears closely after *tam* and the both demonstratives are used regularly (44% for "close" and 56% for "far" adverbs). In the case of *etot* and *tot* the pronouns are not equal: *tot* can appear after more than a year after *etot* and is very infrequent (97% for "close" and 3% for "far" pronouns). It is possible that at first children have only one deictic proximity means (locative adverbs) and don't need to use the second set of demonstratives with the same meaning. Then children take *tot* from the input speech and start using it in a non-deictic way; than they notice the existence of two demonstrative pronouns and form an opposition. Finally, they transfer the proximity opposition from the locative adverbs to the pronouns, and thus the latter become associated with the "close" and "far" situations. This process is similar to one described in (Clark 2003), applied to demonstrative adverbs, but takes more time to be completed. The data of first language acquisition show that the place of proximity opposition place in the meanings of *etot* and *tot* in adults' speech may be farther from the centre than it was considered. So the core meaning of *etot* will be the deictic without reference to the proximity, and the one of *tot* – cataphoric.

The locative adverbs take a special place among other demonstratives. They can be regarded as an "avant-guard" of the demonstratives. They are the first to appear, the first to the anaphoric and other functions and the most frequent to be used in these functions. They are short, unchangeable and thus easy to remember and produce. It can be supposed that children use them to work through the properties and characteristics of demonstratives and then transfer them onto other demonstratives.

References

E.V. Clark (2003) First language acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.