The role of family environment and culture in the language development of children

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Contemporary information society appears in different types of families. However, for upbringing and proper development of the child, there should always be a father and a mother, or other legal guardians of the child, as well as a good atmosphere they can create in their home. Children develop in a given culture and language as part of it. Through language communication parents convey to children their beliefs, attitudes, their system of values or behaviour. Those parental beliefs, attitudes and values determine the development of the child, his attitude towards surrounding reality, that is towards school, teachers or acquiring new knowledge. From the educational work of the family result such features of children as creativity or spontaneity.

Keywords: family environment, proper development of the child, beliefs, attitudes, system of values, behavior

Introductory remarks

In the Polish linguistic education there is reflected the changing socio-economic and political reality of Europe. People are using different languages in their communication, which has affected the decisions of the educational authorities concerning the acquisition of foreign languages. Since 2008 a foreign language has become a compulsory subject in grade one of the Polish primary school (it is English). Since 2010 a second foreign language (French, German, Russian and other options to choose from) has been taught in lower secondary schools as an obligatory subject. Thus, it should be stated that the basis for learning foreign languages is a good command of the mother tongue whose cultural conditioning lies (especially in the initial phase) in the family.

Besides many other definitions, culture is defined as *"the total of scientific, social, artistic and technical values created by people as well as the processes of creating those values*."[1]

Therefore, depending on the object under analysis or kinds of studies connected with it, one may consider factors that underlie its development. Taking into account the process of teaching and learning a mother tongue or foreign languages in the context of current national, European or world solutions, one can admit that such factors include cultural conditions of every family environment which, due to performed caring and educational activities, affects the development of the child's language.

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features of children as creativity or spontaneity.

Cultural traditions of the country and families in a particular language area develop specific styles of upbringing in which such values as diligence, conscientiousness in fulfilling duties or pursuit of defined life goals are highly valued. Thus, the language of communication plays a significant role in conveying values.

In my consideration referring to the topic I have focused on two basic issues, namely:

personality-forming influence of the family in the child's language development at an early school age, by paying attention to the elements of the family environment that affect the possibilities of influencing intellectual development of the child.

The other issue deals with the child's mental predispositions at an early school age and their potential influence on the development of speech.

Talking about the personality-forming influence of the family I have divided the elements of the family environment into:

- those which refer to specific forms of mental development, that is development conditions shaping the mind, morality, in other words - the forms of social coexistence, or aesthetic, technical and organizational needs;

- and those which constitute the conditions of home and family life, that means members of a particular family home.

1. Personality-forming influence of the family in the development of the child's language

Development and educational possibilities are closely linked with the living conditions (housing) of the child's parents (guardians), especially when they are evidently better or worse. It refers to the possibility of learning at home, doing all kinds of homework, the right conditions for mental concentration or undisturbed reading, carefree playing and even restful sleep. There are created individual conditions for the child in the family home. I also draw attention to the level of parents' affluence, their current income and a number of derived factors that may have various consequences in the mental development of the child.

The family's financial status is closely connected with their standard of living, which has undoubtedly a significant impact on health and, also indirectly, on the development and education of the child.

Among the elements of the environmental factors of the family a significant place is taken by hygienic conditions in the family home which refer to personal habits of the family members to keep their flat, clothes and body clean and tidy[2].

Bearing in mind educational aspects prevailing in the family, the question arises about the amount of free time that parents (guardians) can spare for their child after they have done their paid work. It concerns a possibility of active care of the child on the one hand, and negligence out of necessity on the other.

Owing to the economic situation, in many families there are cases when parents (guardians) are forced to make use of their children to do various lighter chores or activities. Depending on the kind, those activities not being deprived of educational values though, may hamper children's learning and limit their indispensable freedom. For those reasons, it should be assumed that generally the more time the children have to spend doing household chores, for instance paid jobs (help on the parents' farm or with any other kind of activities), the worse are educational conditions for them, in other circumstances them being comparable. However, taking into account the controversies surrounding that matter, it is sensible to consider the problem of the child's freedom from the chores impeding his development but connected with the struggle for survival, and the issue of the child's involvement in the parents' activities, as long as it contributes to his education in the moral, social or even mental aspects[3].

The child's development is also determined by the parents' (guardians') cultural needs. It is obvious that the bigger the cultural needs of the parents (guardians), the better chances of a successful intellectual development of a particular child.

Within that subject one can see its diversity in the form of separate issues, such as: needs concerning participation in culture and cultural traditions of the family, education level, intellectual life, size and character of social life, moral level and aesthetic needs [4].

That influence can be observed in any social activities of parents in relation to their children and clearly proves the significance of cultural traditions of the family in shaping their character, mind and interests, or developing their talents.

The child's development may be significantly affected by the level of education of his parents. It concerns not only the completion of a particular class or school but also the scope of knowledge gained in the process of self-education. The level of education of the close family members of the child is one of the key environmental factors in the mental development of the child. It reveals itself not only in the active care of the child, but also in occasional conversations, discussions, criticism, play and other forms of behaviour. It also affects family intellectual life, especially the forms of active cultural interests, as well as the linguistic culture of the home environment.

The data obtained from the research of the pre-school period shows that the majority of utterances heard by the child comes from the people in the nearest environment, that is from the family circle. At the school

age, the proportion of words heard at school soon outweighs those heard at home. The words heard at home educate children only incidentally.

Taking into consideration the utterances heard at home and at school, they undoubtedly predominate over any others, namely over the words heard in the street, on the bus, tram, train, in church, etc.

Therefore, the state of linguistic culture at home and school exerts a great influence over the child's linguistic culture, indirectly over his intellectual development and, in general, over his personality[5].

One of the essential symptoms of personal culture (subtle culture or its lack) is an absence or presence of vulgar vocabulary in the used speech, for example in the form of swear-words or dirty words, especially from the sphere of erotica and sexuality.

The moral culture of the language is connected with a general state of the moral and intellectual culture. Its evaluation, according to the research in some circles of people, is reduced to the reception of speech quality. Learning the moral side of the language culture state in the home environment may be simple. In conversations with the people closest to the child we can hear, or not, coarse or rough phrases. Conclusions can be drawn from the children's colloquial talks or phrases used by them in conversations and interviews.

The moral standard of parents and adults close to children in the family circle affects them, most often, through the so-called "example". Responding to the power of suggestion by yielding to orders, bans and wishes of parents (guardians), the child quickly adjusts himself to their moral world, not being aware yet of the personality traits of the adults related to him. Much easier and faster than intellectually the child adapts his habits to the moral standard of his parents and reflects it in his own behaviour[6].

One of the crucial factors of the family educational environment is individuality of the child's parents (guardians) and other people from his family circle. If one assumes that by individuality one can understand the whole of character, temperament and intellect features characteristic of a particular person, then no matter whether it is weak or strong individuality, it exerts a complex influence on the child through imitation, suggestion, fulfilling wishes, instructions, orders, etc. and guides the development of the child's psyche[7].

The state of the child's development appears in predispositions specific for his age. At a younger school age they comprise school maturity, that is his physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.

2. Mental predispositions of the child at a younger school age and the possibilities of their influence on the language development

According to psychologists, younger school age is the time of preparation for puberty. In the child's brain development, thanks to his contacts with the environment, there get enriched its spheres of visual, auditory and motor association. The basis for the child's activity, besides his mental development, is his motor development. Motor development is conditioned by developing the child's ability to make an effort through games and various motor exercises. Music stimulated activities and other artistic tasks that support physical development by stimulating the abilities of visual-motor coordination, manual dexterity and better control of one's own body are conducive to motor development.

From the neurological point of view it has been stated that at a younger school age there starts an intensive development of the visual sphere of the child, which is responsible for perception and interpretation of images, intensification of perceived forms, remembering or attention. In that period the child's needs also result from the emotional development.

2.1. Emotional development

According to Reykowski, emotional development is a mental process that regulates the relations between the individual and the world, and is of great importance for him[8].

According to that Author, emotional processes receive information that has a positive or negative meaning for the child. As a result, they cause increases or decreases of energy in the organism and expansive reactions. Psychological experiments confirm that sensual impressions stimulate the nervous system and cannot be replaced by simple biological stimuli.

Emotional development of the child is a result of his ties with parents or guardians. That bond is connected with satisfying the need for security. Its result affects relations with different people in the future. The model of contacts with near relatives is copied in contacts with other people from the child's environment. Perturbations in the emotional development lead to disorders in proper adaptation. The causes of such disorders include emotional deprivation , that is depriving the child of love or giving him too much love. The results of emotional deprivation due to the lack of love are: growth retardation, physical, motor and intellectual development retardation, speech retardation and relationship disorders. They reveal in anti-social attitudes, inability to show feelings to others or establish proper emotional contacts. The reverse situation caused by the excess of love leads to the child's shyness, lack of self-confidence or low self-esteem. The result of distorted emotional development is a lack of emotional immunity and inability to control emotions, which further causes failures in relationships with others. Thus, both proper

and improper emotional development of the child is reflected in his school successes and failures.

2.2. Intellectual development

At a younger school age, along with developing intellectual abilities of the child accompanied by the experience gained at school, there occur new development achievements. Children become more fluent in speaking their mind thus gaining better language skills, which is not unimportant for effective learning. Words and symbols gain new meanings for them and "abilities to solve problems show higher levels. The progress in intellectual development taking place then is strengthened by the ability to deal systematically with various variables at the same time".[9]

As the results of psychologists' research show, children at a younger school age also display some cognitive limitations. Although they are characterized by greater systematicity and objectivity than younger children, they are still unable to think in an abstract way. Abstract notions are entirely beyond their experience and children cannot grasp them through analogy. Cognitive achievements appear gradually and in different subject issues may develop unequally. It is worth emphasizing that there exist statistically significant differences in mental activity among particular children at a younger school age.[10]

2.3. Language development

"Language fulfils a lot of functions, serves many purposes and speaks with different voices. The most amazing fact about it is that it can order and inform at the same time, describe and praise, create beauty and explain, and perform all those and many other functions while maintaining contact with another man." [11]

Talking about language development of the child one should emphasise the importance psycho-linguistic studies, stating that language development of the child preconditions many achievements in education. It has been proved in the experiments that the rate of learning vocabulary slows down after the pre-school period, although the general psycho-linguistic development still continues.

When children turn 6, they practically know all the alphabet letters, distinguish a printed form of many words, or understand specific notions. Thus at a younger school age, children show an increasing ability to use words as tools of expression. Language, in combination with cognitive abilities and experience gained in the process of socialization, becomes then the means with the use of which children reveal and confirm their observations and ideas concerning the world.[12]

The development of children's vocabulary at a younger school age shows then its clearer connection with cognitive development. When the child turns one, depending on the environment he is brought up in, he knows only a few words. At the age of three the number of words learnt by the child may increase up to 900. According to the results of the research, at the age of 6, the number of acquired words is about 2600, and at the time of starting education by children in grade six, their active vocabulary contains about 50.000 words. It results from a cognitive development and its environment conditioning, as well as memory abilities needed for memorising and processing new words.[13]

The rate of learning new words by children at that age is quick but understanding words and the relations existing between them develops slowly. Abstract features of many words remain inaccessible for cognitive abilities of the child. [14]

With age, children get to know better the meaning of words and abstract relations between words. While talking, children at a younger school age gradually overcome their egocentrism and, more and more, take into account their listeners. They become more able to perceive the order of speaking during conversations.

From the observations it also results that they better cope with transforming information in order to adjust it to the needs of the listener. Moreover, the majority of children manage, if necessary, to adopt the point of view of the listener.[15]

Not everyone in our society speaks the same language, or uses the same system of grammar or dialect. There exists the phenomenon of language diversity defined as dialects. The basis of dialects is generally the same language, but they differ in phrases and vocabulary details.

Dialect differences result from several various factors, such as: age, geographical location, class membership and language models taken from the family home. Those factors have an undoubted impact on the vocabulary development of the child.

Age is a particularly visible factor in the so-called "generation gap". Representatives of a younger age group like to use newly made-up words, whereas their parents do not always understand them and they tend themselves to use obsolete phrases.

Geographical location of the place in which the child is brought up has also a big influence on dialects. We do not often understand particular words when we listen to dialect differences resulting from geographical location. The consequence of that are different names used for the same thing in different places of the same language area. For example, "potatoes" (kartofle, ziemniaki) are called differently in different geographical regions of our country: in Podhale region they are called "grule", in Poznań – "pyry".

Class membership also affects language differences

acquired by children. Educated people, as opposed to uneducated ones, use a more complicated and better structured language, richer in language subtleties. It results from the models taken from their family environment. A lot of researchers reckon that people using a primitive language do not have deficiencies in their language skills so much, but rather use different, long preserved linguistic models and they speak the language adjusted to the environment in which they function. Their language is functional and complete in that environment and such a vocabulary they hand down to their own children.

It should be remembered that learning does not come easily to all children in the same way. Some children experience difficulties connected with learning and those difficulties may influence a growing up child in many different ways. Learning difficulties mean problems connected with processing, recalling or providing information.[16]

2.4. Disorders and development retardation

Among all children there are always a number of those who show deficiencies in knowledge and behaviour that does not conform to the accepted norms. The causes of that state of affairs include the possibilities of negative influence of the home environment and characteristics of their psychomotor development.

Disorders and development retardation may appear in the functioning of :

- the visual analyzer,
- the auditory analyzer,
- the kinesthetic and motor analyzer,
- several of those analyzers jointly in the cortical part, with simultaneous proper functioning of other analyzers.

However, it should be noted that children with fragmentary development deficiencies can usually think correctly, reason logically, generalize and infer rightly. Abnormalities, the basis of which are the above-listed disorders, mainly refer to the process of learning to read and write.

Children with function disorders of the visual analyzer are unable to carry out analysis and synthesis in space accurately and correctly. They confuse directions and also find it difficult to project simple geometric figures, such as: a circle, a square, a triangle, a parallelogram. They cannot place projected letters or words in ruling.

Disorders and development retardation also manifest themselves in the function of the auditory analyzer. Children with function disorders of the auditory analyzer have difficulties in combining particular sounds into one entity. They have problems with distinguishing sounds that are similar. In the Polish language these may be voiced and unvoiced sounds of the type: b-p, d-t, g-k, w-f. They also find it difficult to understand longer verbal orders, they cannot repeat and remember difficult words or poems.

Disordered functioning of the kinesthetic and motor analyzer causes decreased manual dexterity, lack of accuracy and precision of hand and finger movements. Children are not able to form plasticine or do-it-yourself activities.

Disorders of the psychomotor development concern also the process of lateralization, that is the dominance of one part of the body over the other. It may refer to the functioning of upper and lower limbs or eyes.

We can distinguish here:

1. mono-lateral dominance, when right-handedness is accompanied by right-eyedness and right-leggedness, and contrary - when left-handedness is accompanied by left-eyedness and left-leggedness;
2. cross-dominance consisting in the fact that right-handedness is accompanied by left-eyedness and left-leggedness, and left-handedness is accompanied by right-eyedness and right-leggedness;
3. bi-laterality, when there is no distinctly marked functioning dominance.

Apart from the already mentioned possibilities of the anomalous course of the lateralization process, the studies proved the existence of cross-dominance in the scope of the eye and hand, which appears as disordered visual and motor coordination.

Development disorders and disharmony also include disorders of spatial orientation and speech disorder, being the consequence of hearing impediment, disorders of fonematic hearing or defects of the articulation organs.

It arises from pedagogical and psychological research that an early diagnosis of the causes of disorders and a possibly quickly undertaken therapy may prevent their development and the consequences resulting from them for children. The tests carried out among them prove that learning difficulties are not equivalent to mental retardation since children with difficulties usually have average or above-average intelligence. Researchers think that the problems connected with information processing result from abnormalities in functioning of the central nervous system. Generally, children of that kind show the so-called "uneven" abilities and discrepancy between the desired and actual performance of the tasks. The causes of those difficulties have not been sufficiently studied yet.

Numerous studies of various learning difficulties have shown, though that supporting home environment, motivation of the child to achieve goals, with the use of appropriate intervention, may bring satisfying improvement.[17]

However, one should bear in mind that overcoming learning difficulties must have an individualized character. The strategies used for one child may be

inappropriate for another. Frequently, the needs of the child with learning difficulties require action with a well-defined substance and learning strategies. The strategies of such performances are usually carried out gradually, step by step, and are divided into small units. They require not only the use of appropriate aids, but also lots of patience and teaching skills. It is important to reduce to the minimum the elements distracting attention. Moreover, active efforts are also essential in order to develop and reinforce herein mentioned important cognitive spheres, such as attention span, memory skills and task-solving skills.[18]

Development possibilities of the child's vocabulary, understanding, remembering and skills to use that vocabulary have a fundamental meaning in language skills acquisition and school education prediction.

Conclusion

Speech is a natural and earliest manifestation of a human being's activity; his speech is a reflection and expression of his intellectual and emotional life. Speech is a result of mental development of the child, his cognitive achievements and also educational ones.

The development of the scope of vocabulary, being the foundation of any education, takes place in the course of various cognitive occurrences, activities and experiences of children supported in any possible way by the school and family.

Language skills form a number of simple and complex skills. Simple skills stand for specific ways of expressing thoughts, vocabulary and phraseological relations, ways of combining words and sentences appearing in the course of practical activities or conscious work with the use of knowledge.

Besides school, family as the closest educational environment of the child has a great role to play in language acquisition.

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