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[Preference: oral presentation, main session]

Becoming literate: primary-school children referring to time and place

Framing the story with time and place – building a foundation for coherent narration – increases and becomes diverse when children get to a more literate stage on their development (Berman & Ravid 2008). What also increases is morphosyntactic complexity and lexical specificity (Pajunen 2012, Berman & Ravid 2009). In other words, developmental changes are both quantitative and qualitative and therefore typical measures of complexity or syntactic maturity might not suffice to assess syntax in the context (Camp 2012). To analyze the development of writing skills and language development of Finnish pre-school children, methods employed in this study are corpus-based (with appr. one thousand 1–6 graders writing on the same topic “The day of my dreams”). The data is analyzed with morphosyntactic and pragmasemantic variables.

Regardless of age, there are similarities in the story content and sequencing of the dream day, opening a way to analyze how time and place are conceptualized, what elements of the day schema are getting the writers’ attention and which linguistic means are used to encode it (cf. Strömqvist et al. 2011, Talmy 2000, Berman & Slobin 1994). These lexical and morphosyntactic means are present even among the shortest writings of first graders and offer a basis for a developmental comparison. Examples from first, third and fifth grade exemplify a typical developmental trend from simple lexical time expressions to more complex and abstract structures.

1 st	<u>Aamulla</u>	<i>söisin</i>	<i>herkkuja.</i>	<u>sitten</u>	<i>mentäisiin</i>	<i>särkänniemeen.</i>
	In the morning	I would eat	goodies.	Then	we would go	to Särkänniemi.
3 rd	<i>Kun olimme vieneet</i>	<i>tavarat</i>	<i>huoneeseemme</i>	<i>lähdimme</i>	<i>vaateostoksille</i>	
	When we had taken	the things	to our room	we went	shopping for	clothes.
5 th	<i>[Yöllä] [ennen</i>	<i>nukkumaan</i>	<i>menoa]</i>	<i>söisin</i>	<i>hernekeittoa.</i>	
	At night before	going to	sleep	I would eat	peasoup.	

In my talk I will discuss the development of writing skills by outlining syntactic and referential complexity increase in accordance with age, based on an analysis of the aforementioned corpus. This study is a part of a research project investigating later Finnish development with school-aged children and young adults. (Pajunen 2012, Honko 2013).

Keywords: later language development, syntactic complexity, narrative development, writing skills

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