

# CHILDREN'S WORD CREATION AND SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

*This article reveals the essence of children's word creation (a process of creating new words by a child on the basis of lexical, grammar and phonetic material of a certain language). The stages of children's word creation during preschool childhood are characterized. The specific features of children's word creation are determined (children can change the name or letters of certain things, and due to this changing some functions of the things can be shown; children can change both a word, and a word combination). The role of word creation in the process of children's speech development is revealed too.*

**Keywords:** *child, word creation, speech development, word changeling.*

The process of a person's speech formation is particularly intensive during childhood. That is caused by the fact that children have a flexible mind and their cognitive processes are under active formation. So, it is in childhood when the active development of speech occurs. A child begins to watch the surrounding world and remember its peculiarities from the first days of his/her life. He/She tries to repeat the sounds after his/her parents, imitates different sounds of the world, etc. All these things influence children's speech formation. It is a wonderful fact that children remember different sounds at a very early age without pronouncing them, but they can still remember and pronounce them even some years later. For example, we have observed a girl who at the age of 3-6 months listened to some poems about animals (recited by her mother) where the sounds made by different animals were pronounced; when the girl was 6 months old, her mother stopped reciting these poems about animals and recited the others. A year later, when this girl learnt to pronounce the sounds made by animals (*meow, woof, etc.*), she could easily pronounce them even without listening to them and repeating (for instance, when she was asked what sound a duck makes, she said quack, but her parents and relatives told that nobody had taught her to pronounce this sound and the girl had not seen a duck before). The thing is that the girl could straight away only pronounce the animal sounds which she had heard in the poem, but she could not immediately pronounce new animal sounds which she had not heard before.

Everything children hear during their childhood is remembered and it influences their speech development. Children's language acquisition assumes joint activities of auricular and speech motor analyzers. Acoustic images of speech which are imprinted in their memory become the basis of sound reproduction. Comparing the pronunciation of sounds with people's speech patterns, children improve their pronunciation and achieve its complete coincidence with adults' pronunciation. Besides, at first, children master the sounds which are easy for them to pronounce.

However, pronouncing new words and learning to speak, children can change words. It is caused by the peculiarities of the formation of their speech organs, special exercises done by them with the help of their parents, teachers and the environment, adaptation of the words according to children's possibilities, similarities in sounds of different words, etc. Due to this fact, new words, made by children, appear, and sometimes they are considered to be difficult to understand by adults. In this case, it is necessary to remember that children can make up their own meanings when they create new words. Children's word creation is a process of creating new words by a child on the basis of lexical, grammar and phonetic material of a certain language (often children's mother tongue).

Children's word creation is one of the specific elements of children's subculture<sup>1</sup>. It means children's creation and use of words changelings, neologisms and etymology.

A well-known Russian children's writer K. Chukovskiy, who investigated children's word creation and described it in some of his children's books, considered that due to free experiments with sound enfoldings, which lead to the creation of many new words (they are often comic), a child optimally masters the system of speech norms that has been formed historically. The writer himself created a new concept – a word changeling that means a word which names a wrong state of affairs, some impossible thing. In K. Chukovskiy's opinion, some of children's neologisms can become attainment of some Slavic dialect, as they show speech traditions of adults' world very accurately<sup>2</sup>.

These words changelings have some specific features. Firstly, children can change the name of a certain thing (changing some letters), but due to this changing some functions of the thing can be shown. Children can add wrong endings to the words or combine some words in one. Using different prefixes, suffixes and endings in new words often matches the language laws and is grammatically right – only combinations are unexpected. That underlines children's fine sense of language. Child's ability to do it indicates the formation of inter-word connection in his/her mind and the beginning of emerging word creation paradigm. That is a good start of the process of children's construction of lexical units. Secondly, children can change not only the word, but a word combination – they do it to learn about the surrounding world, to doubt its common understanding and to be sure of their own knowledge about the world. For instance, children can tell that roses can grow in birch-trees, or when it rains grapes (not water drops) fall down. Some of these word changelings are even written in folk humour culture (buffoonery, carnival, etc.) and they were specially created and saved for children's entertaining (*Foma rides a hen and Timoshka rides a cat*).

It is important to note that in the Western and Eastern European culture word changelings were a great means of children's expansion of consciousness, development of their creative abilities. Listening to the word changelings and creating their own changelings, children become aware of their knowledge about nature and the purposes of various things.

The peak of word creation activity can be observed when a child is 3-7 years old. At the age of 3 visual-imaginative thinking emerges and begins to develop intensively. Moreover, at this age children understand some regularities of morphemic structure of words. The level of a child's thinking enables him/her to create new words on the basis of fairly difficult processes of analysis and synthesis.

In preschool childhood the character of children's speech development undergoes certain changes: independent creative speaking-thinking activity takes place instead of imitation. In his/her word creation a child creates new words which he/she has never heard. However, a child's communication with adults is still very important for his/her speech development, as adults' speech becomes the object of analysis and the material in which he/she can see the ways of word creation that are used most often.

Thus, we can describe the character of the development of children's word creation system. At first, words are the descriptive designation of a certain situation. Then, synthesis is added to analysis of different objects. At last, analysis goes deep into consciousness, and a new word appears as the only designation of a certain subject or phenomenon. By the end of preschool childhood a child's vocabulary increases and the need in new words and word creation gradually fades away.

The Russian scientist V. Kudryavtsev asserted that the phenomenon of changeling goes beyond literature and speech formation; a unique mental mechanism of children's entering the human world and awareness of culture is in this phenomenon. These word changelings can have not only a verbal form, but also an imaginative-operative form. It can be seen when a child uses and plays with a certain thing after learning its name, specific features and functions. This phenomenon is called an inversion effect and means a specific system of exploratory, probatory and investigative actions, the subject of which is a problem sphere of a child's surrounding world<sup>3</sup>. This inversion action is aimed at changeling of different elements of human social-cultural experience, but it is also a way of making a dialogue between children and adults, a psychological instrument of their conversation.

Any inversion action of a child is aimed at adults, as children have a feeling that a boundary between usual and unusual is clearly made in adults' consciousness. The aspiration to cross this boundary (by means of manipulations with some surrounding things) is actually experiments with consciousness, adults' inner world. While playing pranks, a child violates the rules of behaviour and unconsciously aims at self-orientation and self-determination in the subjective space of an adult who is important for a child.

Children's aspiration to be heard is a motivation of their word creation. In his/her word creation experiments a child separates his/her unique speech from adults' speech stream, and at the same time he/she stimulates his/her communication with adults<sup>4</sup>.

Children's neologisms are not the results of insufficient knowledge of word-formative means of the mother tongue, because, as a rule, children use the right grammar forms. That is why word creation is a way of a child's isolation, and at the same time it is the spontaneous expression of his/her natural aspiration to integration into a single community with adults. Thereby children initiate intergeneration connection the same way adults do it speaking to children.

The formation of children's vocabulary is closely connected with the processes of word creation. The lexical level of language is the aggregate of lexical units which are the result of the mechanisms of word formation. Children's word creation is often connected with the formation of linguistic generalizations and becomes a part of a general system of word creation. If a child cannot use ready words, he/she "invents" them according to the rules which he/she has already learnt. Children's constant mastering adults' language is not actually acquisition of this language, but children's independent construction of the language<sup>5</sup>.

Some parents feel disappointed when they hear some "incorrect" words and try to change them as soon as possible. Unfortunately such parents forget that children's neologisms are a part of children's speech development process. There is no use to correct children - they will soon correct themselves, or they can just pronounce neologisms to entertain, to see adults' reaction to such words or to show their abilities in creating words. Children's word creation is a bright phenomenon of childhood and children's subculture. The older children get, the fewer neologisms and "incorrect" words we will hear. But they can surely show the active process of children's language acquisition and speech development and a high level of children's creativity.

In such a way, children's word creation facilitates the development of a child's ability to invert the knowledge that he/she gains, to invert the ways and instruments of its gaining. It is considered to be a criterion of the emergence of consciousness at an early age and a general indicator of mental development during all childhood. Children's word creation is based on the global regularity of cultural development that provides continuity and gradualness in this development. To create new words, a child has to do a great job: he/she observes, analyses, compares, makes conclusions and gets aware of his/her communicative possibilities. Word creation can be discerned in the speech of many children all over the world, and it plays a significant role in their speech development.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Абраменкова, 2000; Ионова, 1997; Осорина, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Чуковский, 1981.

<sup>3</sup>Кудрявцев, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Кудрявцев, 2001; Кудрявцев, 1999.

<sup>5</sup>Цейтлин, 2013.

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