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THE ACQUISITION OF PLACE NAMES IN MOTHER TONGUE LEARNING: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON CHILDREN'S SPATIAL COGNITION

The paper reviews and complements existing knowledge about the acquisition of proper names. On the basis of research into children's language, it seems obvious today that the process of acquisition of proper names (anthroponyms) is simultaneous to the acquisition of common nouns. However, the underlying mechanisms explaining the separation of the two groups of nouns are controversial. Compared to the case of anthroponyms, learning toponyms is a more complicated and a longer-lasting process. In connection with this topic, researchers dealing with spatial cognition are focusing on spatial orientation, on the localisation of spatial information in the brain and on spatial language. They study neither the way children get to know the wider geographical environment, nor the way they acquire toponyms. The author seeks to obtain more information about the beginning of this process based on the study of two small children's toponymic knowledge in connection with their acquisition of geographical common nouns and the development of spatial orientation. This makes it possible to draw preliminary conclusions about the specificity of the cognitive mechanisms ensuring the knowledge of geographical environment. The author suggests that the meaning of early toponyms is typically under-generalised — children tend to interpret the names of cities/towns or streets by restricting them to a certain house. It has also been made evident that, at the age of 2–4 years, the relationship between places and persons is very tight (for instance, children connect the names of places to specific persons). The semantic contingencies can be explained by the fact that, in the case of children, the place concepts themselves (what is a city/town?, what is a street?, etc.) have not been fully constructed yet, and that the elements of space are still not distinct entities.

Key words: Hungarian language, language acquisition, acquisition of proper names, place names, toponyms, spatial cognition, cognitive map, toponymic knowledge.

1. Introduction

In onomatological research specialists deal almost exclusively with the onomastic knowledge of adults: in studying either communal or individual onomastic corpora, they rely on the knowledge of adult speakers. The acquisition of first proper names is definitely not a mainstream topic in onomatological studies. However, this issue is interesting not only in itself, but also for being informative regarding the later use of proper names.

The acquisition of lexical units comprises both the acquisition of forms and their meanings. Babies relate repeatedly occurring syllable combinations to a particular situation (for example, to the usual morning greeting or to a person), i.e. the given sequence of phonemes is transformed into a word [Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 2005, 138]. In each situation babies consider the sentences as relevant, i.e. the initial representation of a word always has elements related to the specific episode in which the word occurs. Afterwards, under the influence of social reinforcements and the newer occurrences, the meaning of words will progressively reach the meaning in adult language [MacWhinney, 2003, 510–513].

As far as the development of the meaning of words is concerned, researchers dealing with children's language did not address proper nouns for a long time; they studied neither the differences in the acquisition of common nouns and proper nouns, nor the mechanisms governing the processes. Therefore, earlier, onomatologists could only make assumptions concerning the way proper nouns appear in children's language. For instance, in 1970, György Szépe was of the opinion that, at an early stage of language acquisition, proper and common nouns are not yet differentiated, and that the two categories become separated only later [Szépe, 1970, 308].

Recently, this topic has been addressed in research into children's language. According to general experience, babies have word representations already by the age of one [Hall, 2009, 406–408; MacWhinney, 2003, 508]. Before the age of one, they understand certain words, and when they are about one year old or a little bit older they start producing words. It has also been revealed that at the beginning of their lexical development small children acquire both proper and common nouns (the designations of countable objects by common nouns) [Hall, 2009, 404–408; Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 2005, 127]. In this phase, however, besides appellatives, early words do not yet include proper names other than anthroponyms and words with the functionality of anthroponyms. Conclusions drawn from research on the acquisition of anthroponyms, however, can be applicable to the acquisition of other types of proper names, including toponyms.

Experimental research shows that infants will associate the words *Mummy* and *Daddy* with their own parents as early as at the age of six months, while they extend

the meaning of the words *hands* and *feet* to the images of various hands and feet [Tincoff & Jusczyk, 1999; 2000]. In order to get knowledge about the word acquisition process, children living naturally in an English language environment were also subjected to studies which found that babies make a distinction between proper nouns and appellatives at the age of 8 to 9 months, as they tend to extend appellatives to new entities, which does not happen with names [Fenson et al., 1994]. In some cases researchers noticed the under-generalisation of common words and the over-generalisation of proper nouns, though such occurrences seem to be very rare [Hall, 2009, 407]. However, these words do not function in an adult manner.

It is accepted that the early acquisition of meaning by children are governed by conceptual biases. According to Hall, babies conceive certain entities (specifically human beings) as individual existing beings, while they conceive other entities (objects) as specimens of corresponding categories. This binary distinction constitutes the basis for linguistic categorisation, i.e. these early biases govern children when they interpret the words referring to human beings as proper nouns and most of the other words referring to objects as common nouns [Ibid., 422–429]. However, according to other scholars, it can be expected that children don't possess a mature principle of extendibility. Nevertheless, children are able to distinguish and categorise objects. In possession of this ability, they are able to quickly modify their first assumption about the proprial meaning of a word and switch to its interpretation as a common noun [Hennon et al., 2002]. In connection with the theory of biases several other questions are still unanswered. For instance, the factors determining the initial constructions created by babies and their later ability to extend proper nouns to concepts other than individuals (e.g. cities/towns, streets, cinemas, etc.) are unclear.

It seems that, besides the initial biases, the name use and the linguistic behaviour of the parents play an important role. According to recent studies, children's interpretation is influenced by the way their parents familiarise them with different objects [Hall, Burns & Pawluski, 2003]. Researchers were interested in finding out how parents linguistically treat the situation when they teach their child a particular proper noun as the name of one individual at one time and as the name of two individuals belonging to the same category (animal figure) at another time. Then the same test was carried out with inanimate objects (e.g. shoe) presented by proper nouns, which do not get proper name in general. In those instances parents not only used the name, but also gave children a short explanation of the situation. Although that study did not focus on the linguistic behaviour of children beginning to acquire words, but analysed the way parents talked to 2 to 4 years old children, the linguistic behaviour of the parents obviously characterises the earlier communication to children as well. Hence, one of the important elements of parental behaviour is providing an example and an interpretation, but besides this, the positive or negative confirmation of children's name use is obviously essential. This kind of parental behaviour must be relevant not only for the acquisition

of personal names, it may play a similar role in the acquisition of other kinds of proper nouns, including toponyms.

Later on, besides the initial biases and the help provided by parents, other factors (e.g. awareness of the morpho-syntactic differences between the two groups of lexical units) also support the appropriate acquisition of new proprial and appellative nouns [Katz et al., 1974; Gelman & Taylor, 1984; Hall 1991]. However, the grammatical distinctiveness of the two word classes is not necessarily a universal phenomenon. For instance, in the Japanese language there are no grammatical elements that would indicate clearly whether a particular word is a proper noun or a common word. Nevertheless, in the case of new words children are able to identify their referents, and this ability might be based on conceptual biases (and parental help) [Imai & Haryu, 2004, 413–416]. At the same time, it can be assumed that those babies in whose native language the difference between the two word classes is expressed grammatically, also make use of this knowledge. For instance, it is obvious that from the appropriate phase of their development, English or Hungarian children also rely on this fact in the identification of the referents of new words. Since the grammatical markedness of place names also varies from one language to another, in different languages this factor may have a different role in the acquisition of this class of names. However, children can also be presumed to attribute new elements to the class of toponyms relying on the grammatical markedness as soon as they have recognized these clues.

2. The development of spatial cognition and acquisition of toponyms

As compared to anthroponyms (and to certain animal names), the learning of other types of proper names, such as toponyms, is a much longer process. Toponyms are also linguistic universals. It is therefore particularly interesting that they appear in children's language with a significant delay in comparison with anthroponyms, and even afterwards, the development of semantic contents approaching those of adults takes a considerable time. All this might seem inexplicable since spatial cognition and orientation are essential preconditions of human existence.¹ Studies on place name acquisition are virtually completely absent from cognitive studies. Yet, since toponymic representations are closely linked with spatial representations in the mental system, it would be beneficial for our topic to briefly overview research on spatial cognition.

In cognitive psychology the concept of the cognitive map appeared in the middle of the 20th century [Tolman, 1948]. The cognitive or mental map is the combination of cognitive representations concerning the external environment. Thus, cognitive maps contain information about the spatial situation of objects or persons and about their relationship with the environment. It is our cognitive maps that help us to find our

¹ Although it is well known that toponyms do not help in spatial orientation, their role is still important in speaking about space [see Reszegi, 2012a; 2012b, 374].

way back home from our workplace without paying particular attention, even when we are deep in thought.

After the appearance of this concept, researchers focused initially on the complex representation of space. Studies on spatial orientation revealed information about the spatial cognition of adults. According to Lynch, an individual's mental map is composed of a combination of roads, demarcation lines, sectors, hubs and directions and of their interrelations, and momentary perception or experience-based memories also play a role [Lynch, 1960, 4–8]. Subsequently, in some cases toponyms were also taken into account by researchers in order to find out more about mental maps, e.g. the subjective map of Great Britain from a “native” Londoner's eye view or the subjective map of the United States from a Texas farmer's eye view [Down & Stea, 1977].

The development of spatial orientation abilities, the mental reflection process of the closer environment is studied by cognitive development psychology. Spatial orientation and spatial cognition develop in parallel with the kinetic development of infants. Each newly acquired form of kinetic development (sitting, crawling, etc.) results in new forms of spatial experience as well. Besides relying on the egocentric reference framework, about 6.5 months old infants are already helped by the orientation points of the allocentric (environment-centred) situation in their orientation, and when they become 9 to 10 months old, this becomes predominant [Györkö, Lábadi & Beke, 2012].

The development of the wider spatial thinking of children is studied by applying the method of drawing and interviewing. Piaget and Inhelder [1967] asked children of different ages (6 to 10 years old) to draw their dwelling place and its surroundings. They analysed these maps and distinguished three phases in the development of spatial visualisation. The initial, “topological,” level is still characterised by the egocentric approach: the centre of children's mental map is their own home, the map also contains some better-known places, but those places are not interconnected, and directions, proportions and distances do not reflect reality. The next, “projective,” level shows a development in itself (projective level 1 and 2): the picture of the surrounding environment is becoming more and more detailed, the spatial relations are developing, and directions, proportions and distances are improving. The “Euclidean” level is already characterised by cartographic abstraction, the elements of space are organised by the individual on the basis of an abstract reference system [cf. Biel, 1986]. There is no strong correlation between the levels and children's ages, because children show significant individual differences in reaching these levels. Researchers, however, mainly focus on the development of the mental reflection of space, and not on the emergence of place names, nor on the development of their meanings and usage.

As regards spatial processing, it is mediated by the visual systems which is believed to be formed by two pathways (two-stream hypothesis). The ventral pathway (the inferior pathway located between the occipital lobe and the temporal lobe) is called the ‘what’ pathway, since it has been formerly believed that this pathway makes processing with a higher resolution and focuses more on forms. The dorsal pathway

(the superior pathway located between the occipital lobe and the parietal lobe) has been called the ‘where’ pathway, because it has been believed that it provides a lower resolution and is more sensitive to locations and motions [Ungerleider & Mishkin, 1982]. However, on the basis of case studies in human neuropsychology it has become clear that this separation is untenable in the functioning of the human mind, given that there is no such sharp boundary between these pathways [Milner & Goodale, 1997]. However, in cognitive linguistics Landau and Jackendoff’s modularist theory, applying the two-stream hypothesis to the language, has become decisive. According to that theory, speaking about objects (the world of nouns) is part of the ‘what’ pathway, while the linguistic coding of places (the expressions of spatial relations in the language) is part of the ‘where’ pathway [Landau & Jackendoff, 1996]. This theory concerns basically locative designations by common nouns (cf. *The vase is on the table*). However, if we extend the theory to elements that denote locations, toponyms as the designations of objects would be part of the ‘what’ pathway, which is relatively independent from the ‘where’ pathway. Then again, the vision research theory upon which the hypothesis is based is controversial, since the two systems are not clearly segregated within our brains. In the light of the above, utilizing the holistic brain model as a model of spatial cognition processes appears to be better justified. The holistic models do not assume any linguistic module which would be independent from the other components of the cognitive system and do not pre-suppose autonomous sub-systems within the language either. Therefore, it can be assumed that the cognitive maps and the linguistic (and the toponymic) system are not independent from each other.

As has been noted in my overview, researchers dealing with spatial cognition focus on spatial orientation, on the reflection of spatial information and their localisation in the brain, on the linguistic equivalents of spatial relations and their interconnections, as well as on the development of these elements during childhood. They do not study the way a child starts dividing the geographic environment, nor the way a child acquires the place designations by proper nouns and common nouns. It is however evident that those tasks are not easy. Further on, I will address the reflection of the geographic environment and the development of the meaning of geographic common names, together with the acquisition of proper names, because I assume their development takes place in a closely intertwined manner.

3. Data and methods

In order to gain a better understanding of the initial phase of the process, I followed the developments of two infants’ knowledge on names through eight months. Upon initiation of the research, Lili was two years old, and Máté was three and a quarter years old. Neither the number of the children covered by the scope of the research, nor its duration is sufficient to make generalized statements on the process, still, the data can be used to make preliminary conclusions, which can then be refined by subsequent research.

Lili is my own daughter. She started talking at a very early age, and her speech developed rapidly; her holophrases were replaced by word combinations when she was 15 months old, and at the age of 20 months, she produced longer sentences of 3 to 4 words. I logged her linguistic development, and made a video recording of our conversations at least once every month. As I wished to keep track of how her knowledge of toponyms develops, I kept a record of the appearance of the first toponyms, and subsequently recorded monthly conversations in which toponyms came up, for example, while playing puzzles, I asked her where various members of the family lived, in which city, in which street, or in which country a particular city is located; what route to take to a certain relative of ours, etc. Apart from the recordings, we spoke about different places several times, because our relatives live in different parts of the country and abroad; also in connection with our journeys; in connection with her children's books in which we also encounter travelling, remote continents, etc.

In other families the topic of locations and toponyms is usually a less central topic. This is true for Máté's family as well. Máté is the little boy from a family we know, and I learned about the development of his usage of toponyms based on the testimony given by his mother. Additionally, I have also personally met and talked with him on several occasions. Máté's development of speech started relatively late; up until the age of two, he only used a few words and his telegraphic speech was replaced by multi-word sentences when he was two and a half years old. This was also the point at which he started using toponyms.

It seems very important to pay attention to one theoretical question. Just like the mentioned words *Mummy* and *Daddy*, at a certain stage of their linguistic development, children can interpret common nouns as proprial designations of places because of the uniqueness of the denoted object in their experience. It can be assumed, for example, that at first the words designating different parts of their home (e.g. *kitchen* or *playroom*) may seem to them to be monoreferential. These words can be considered as proto-toponyms or quasi-toponyms, and it is obvious that they play an important role in the formation of the corresponding cognitive function of identification of a place by a word. So this early stage is essential for the emergence of real place names. However, this study focuses on the acquisition of "real" toponyms, i.e. the words that adults attribute to the class of toponyms, and the connecting geographic environment.

4. Results and preliminary conclusions

Answering to the question "Where do you live?", Lili used her first toponyms already at the age of two: *Debrecenben* 'in Debrecen', a *Sinai Miklós utcán* 'in Sinai Miklós street'. Almost simultaneously with these toponyms her corpus of toponyms was enriched with further city names and country names. During the period of eight months she learned more names and we also located the places we talked about on a map. Therefore, at present Lili knows and uses in one way or another more than twenty toponyms,

mainly macrotoponyms; street names: *Sinai Miklós utca*, *Darabos utca*, *Damjanich utca*; names of cities and towns: *Debrecen*, *Radvány*, *Nánás*, *Budapest*, *Gyula*, *Sárospatak*; country names: *Magyarország* ‘Hungary’, *Svájc* ~ **Svájcország* ‘Switzerland’ (actually, there is no form with the formant *ország* ‘country’ in the standard literary language), *Hollandia* ‘the Netherlands’, *Németország* ‘Germany’; continent names: *Afrika* ‘Africa’, *Európa* ‘Europe’, *Dél-Amerika* ‘South America’; other macrotoponyms: *Balaton*, *Duna* ‘Danube’. Besides these toponyms she used temporarily some toponyms that had been mentioned once or twice during our talks, but had not been mentioned later, hence their cognitive relation was not reinforced to such an extent that they could be preserved. In addition to names, I have also sought to explain the meaning of certain geographical common names (*utca* ‘street’, *város* ‘town/city’, *ország* ‘country’, *tó* ‘lake’, *hegy* ‘mountain’) to her. These forms have been memorised, but the related semantic content is still far from the semantic content existing in the language of adults.²

Máté has similar toponymic knowledge as Lili, he also knows some street names (e.g. *Pereces utca 6*. ‘6, Pereces street’, *Rákóczi*) some names of city parts (e.g. *Liget*) some city names (e.g. *Genf* ‘Geneva’), some country names (e.g. *Ausztia* ‘Austria’, *Svájc* ‘Switzerland’), as well as some geographical common names. For the time being, the semantic content of toponyms and geographical common names is rather contingent.

In the family of the three-year-and-eleven-month-old Máté it was due to the study that the topic of places and toponyms came to the forefront. He was two and a half years old when he used his first toponyms; in answer to the question “Where do you live?” he replied: *Pereces utca 6* (‘6, Pereces street’). Later on, his toponymicon was also extended by newer elements; just like Lili, he is familiar with the names of certain streets, cities, countries, other macrotoponyms, as well as a few geographical common words. The general character of the current name corpus known to him is very similar to that of Lili’s. This similarity manifest itself in the number and the classes of the names, but also in their knowledge of the same toponyms (like *Debrecen* or *Svájc* known to both children). Since the two families have many common features, the high degree of similarity between the two children’s process of toponym acquisition obviously cannot be generalized. However, it seems possible to draw some observations based on the study of the two children.

At this age, children are in the earliest (topological) phase within the phase sequence of spatial thinking as introduced by Piaget and Inhelder [1967]. This phase is characterized by the fact that beyond their own homes, which carry central importance, there are only a few other better known places on the mental map formed in the children’s minds, and these latter places are independent from the former. The sequence in which toponyms are acquired also follows this pattern. At an early stage, children acquire the name of their own place of residence or perhaps the name of an area which

² It must be noted, however, that adult linguistic meanings also manifest significant discrepancies between individuals [cf. Tolcsvai, 2008, 39; Reszegi, 2012b, 369].

is important for some other reason. Later on, a child's vocabulary of names becomes broadened and the meanings of names develop on the basis of spatial experience or with the information conveyed through speech. The language use and name use of parents or those communities to which a child belongs obviously play a decisive role in the division and the representation of the geographic environment, as well as in the acquisition of toponyms. The other basic factor is the geographic environment itself, where a child obtains his or her experience concerning places. Consulting maps also provides further opportunities to shape spatial and toponymic knowledge — however, I think that this is not typical at such an early age, (at least, it operates in a different way than in the case of adults).

In the acquisition of toponyms there are probably no such conceptual biases as in the case of the distinction of anthroponyms and common names at the beginning of language acquisition. However, by the time children start learning geographical common names and toponyms, they have already practised many times the attribution of meanings and they can also rely on their knowledge about the existence of individualising designations and category designations, and they also know certain semantic characteristics of those designations.

In that case too, the process operates by a similar principle to that used for other words. According to my studies, the meaning of toponyms also tend to be under-generalised. Initially, Lili connected *Debrecen* to our own flat, then the same role was taken by *Sinai Miklós utca* (cf. *Menjünk haza a Sinai Miklósomba!* 'Let's go home to my Sinai Miklós [street name]'). Under-generalisation is based on the fact that children link to the given phonetic form the specific contents of which they have real experience. Therefore, they interpret the names of different places consistently with reference to a narrow and well conceivable place. Lili interprets the toponyms *Svájc* 'Switzerland' or *Németország* 'Germany' also in this way: 'the place, the house and its surroundings where her aunt works' or 'the place, the house and its surroundings where her mother has gone'. Máté's knowledge about names can be characterised similarly: for him, *Rákóczi* 'Rákóczi street' also denotes the house of his grandparents, and *Genf* 'Geneva' is the place where his aunt's family lives.

It is also possible to quote cases in which even these specific meanings are not associated with the name, i.e. children use a series of sounds they heard earlier and interpreted as a toponym only to imitate the speech of adults, without, however, linking any other semantic information to it. Lili, for example, said the following in the course of a pretended phone conversation: *Mi még mindig Hollandiában, Miskolcon vagyunk* 'We are still in the Netherlands, in Miskolc' — with the latter being the name of a city in Hungary. Therefore, the only toponym feature apparently important to her is that of marking places, but, for the while being, she attributes no more specific meaning to these series of sounds.

The quoted examples prove children's ability to acquire series of sounds with toponymic function without differentiating toponyms according to the types of places

the denote. This is the very reason, however, why no conceptual content similar to that of adults can be presumed, but barely some sort of a preliminary association. There are cases where not even the latter is developed. Máté, for example, learnt a new children's song at the kindergarten with the word *Duna* (the name of a river) in its lyrics, yet, when asked if he knew what Duna was, his reply was negative. Then again, in this regard, it is important to remember that there is a long period during which it is not so much the meaning of songs and nursery rhymes that is important to children, but rather their rhythm; they quite often cannot remember the lyrics exactly, but simply follow the rhythm of the song, in other words, their requirements when learning these series of sounds are different.

Based on the development of the two children's knowledge of toponyms, the associations made between places and persons at this age can be presumed to be very close as yet. This is reflected partly by the fact that children link certain toponyms to specific persons. In some cases it is not the nature of the place which is dominant, the meaning of the different toponyms can instead be determined as for instance 'grandpa and grandma and their house', i.e. 'the place where grandpa and grandma usually are'. It was observed that Lili likes using locative structures with anthroponyms when she names places which can be easily delimited but which are not mentioned by adults by proper names, for instance, it is the case with the designation of playgrounds: *Anton játszótère* 'Anton's playground', *Benedek játszótère* 'Benedek's playground'.

Both children know the words *város*, *utca*, *ország* ('town/city', 'street', 'country' respectively), and since we have talked about this, Lili is able to enumerate some toponyms as examples. As proven by mix-ups (e.g. answers such as *Anglia* 'England' or *Afrika* 'Africa' given to the question *Milyen városok vannak?* 'What cities are there?'), names are not yet strictly associated to a single category of concepts, the meanings of the words are still contingent and very similar to each other. At the same time, it seems to be easier to tie names to categories in cases where the name itself includes the word denoting the type of place. In the Hungarian language, for example, there are country names including the word *ország* ('country') as a constituent, in an analogous manner to which Lili created the word form **Svájcország* ('Swisscountry'). With respect to developing adult language meanings for geographical common words, the relationship between appellatives and proper names can be presumed to be bidirectional; children's knowledge on toponyms helps them develop a conceptual content for appellatives denoting places, while the development of an appellative meaning also effects the semantic content related to the places denoted by appellatives. During our talks the representation of names and geographical common names, as well as the representation of the environment itself are under constant change. Needless to say, actual spatial experiences also have a role in the process.

Beyond the semantic contingencies outlined above, early name use is also characterised by the fact that toponyms consisting of several linguistic elements are used as

linguistic units. For instance, as an answer to the question “Where do you live?” Máté has been using for quite some time the designation *Pereces utca 6* as one single unit. According to certain representatives of cognitive semantics, names are managed by speakers as coherent linguistic units later on as well, that is, they are considered to be structures which can be incorporated into texts and understood without analysing their inner morphological, syntactical and semantic properties [Tolcsvai, 2008, 37–38]. There are, however, several factors indicating that the existence of analytic processing can be presumed as well (e.g. semantically motivated errors limited in scope to certain constituents of names), which are particularly characteristic of individuals faced with toponyms previously unknown to them [Reszegi, 2016]. Children can also be assumed to apply such dual processing in the course of acquiring toponyms, with the earliest fixed forms initially being treated as single linguistic units, and analytically processed later on.

It must also be pointed out that children typically hear names in textual contexts, in conjugated forms, thus, they learn what suffixation is characteristic of names along with the names themselves. Still, studying Lili’s name usage, I found that she probably learnt the suffixation of names along with the names themselves, as she makes no mistakes in conjugation.

Behind semantic contingencies several factors may be taken into account. On the one hand, I found that children try to link the names to specific places that can be easily delimited. However, it is also typical that humans tend to interpret a certain place as a particular part of space. However, spatial elements are not separated from each other in such a way that persons are, which means that places are not individually existing, distinct entities [cf. Hoffmann, 1993, 38]. This might explain the fact that, compared to anthroponyms, the names of places appear significantly later in the process of mother tongue acquisition.

In connection with semantic uncertainties it must also be taken into account that for the concept of ‘street’, ‘town/city’ or ‘country’, the environment needs to be approached from a much wider perspective than the actual experience of a child of that age. As far as the information related to toponyms is concerned, the knowledge of adults is also very different, given that the type and the localisation of the place, as well as the events, persons and habits may all form part of it. There is, however, a great difference in the semantic content of the toponyms of adults and those of small children: indeed, in the case of children, the knowledge of the place type is uncertain because the place concepts (what is a town/city?, what is a street?, etc.) have not been constructed yet. In the absence of those concepts children are unable to use the related information obtained from the talks.

Landscape objects are perhaps somewhat more concrete, but in Lili’s case, the corresponding proper names are yet lacking, and orographic common names have rather uncertain meanings, similarly to the denominations of waters. Such uncertainty is typical of Máté’s knowledge of names as well. This has an obvious connection with the fact

that the children live in a city situated on the Great Hungarian Plain, and, though they have made occasional journeys to mountainous areas, their relevant experiences are still rather limited. In this respect, later on, besides experiences, maps may provide assistance (both with natural and man-made places), for the time being, however, their interpretation is clearly beyond the abilities of such a young infant. Lili already does, however, have a perfectly clear understanding of some map-related aspects: she knows, for example, that if we want to find out where a particular place is, we have to quickly find a map; also, she does recognize maps of Hungary, and can associate a couple of its points with certain city names. I believe that later on information found on maps will help the formation of a mental image of the broader geographical environment, and the formation of concepts of places and the meanings of place names as well.

However, in Lili's case, eight months after the appearance of the first names there are some observable indications of the development of toponymic concepts. For example, concept of *street* and her street names slowly approach those of adults: the question *Ez még mindig a Darabos utca?* 'Is it still Darabos street?' asked while we were walking down Darabos street suggests, for instance, that she is already able to extend the word *street*, and relates it not only to a specific building like before. So, after the initial under-generalisation, the meaning of the word starts to broaden. On the other hand, in the case of the older child, Máté, there was still a perceptible semantic uncertainty with respect to the word *utca* 'street' and street names even towards the end of the study. The localisation knowledge related to names is also developing. In the case of street names it is based partly on actual experience; but in connection with some city names it is also clear that Lili already stores such knowledge as well, cf.: *Radvány messze van, oda vonattal kell menni* 'Radvány [settlement name] is far away, you have to go there by train'. It has been observed that Lili's name corpus is broadening and her mental map is becoming more complex. For instance, she has memorised directions between certain distinct orientation points, for example the direction to *Anton játszótère* 'Anton's playground' or the direction to the place where we usually go to buy bread.³

Even at a later stage, development implies both qualitative and quantitative changes. Children's place concepts, the basic categories of spatial division slowly approach those of adults, and in interaction with those concepts and categories, the meaning of toponyms also changes and their number grows. The pace of this process is obviously dependent on the child's fields of interests, as well as on his or her related experience (effective spatial and speech-based experience). However, for the time being, we only have assumptions concerning the course of this process. We do not have any knowledge about the point in time when children become able to describe paths, e.g. to provide orientation instructions about the immediate environment in which they

³ Similar objects also appear on the maps drawn by older children, representing the immediate environment in which they live [cf. Budai, 2008].

live. Thanks to the increased momentum that sociological name studies have gained in the last few years, we do already have some idea of how extensive the toponymicon of schoolchildren under the age of ten is: schoolchildren surveyed by Györffy [2015, 14] are familiar with 10–20 toponyms within their own settlement. Additionally, they are also familiar with further names, such as names of the neighbouring settlements, of larger or better known settlements and areas, those of lakes and countries. Still, socio-onomastics, in line with its purposes, is aimed at the knowledge of and the usage of toponymic corpora limited to specific areas, e.g. a settlement and its boundaries, and does not endeavour to uncover the entire toponym stock known to a particular individual [cf. Reszegi, 2015, 172].

5. Conclusions

Thanks to studies using functional approaches, we have recently found out more about the name giving and name usage habits of adult speakers with regards to various types of names. However, no comprehensive image of name usage can be obtained without due consideration being paid to the initiation and early phases of the process. To the present day, no studies of such nature have been launched within the field of onomastic research, therefore scholars addressing the issue have to delve into the psycholinguistic research carried out on child language as a starting point. As proven by my overview, however, most of the relevant studies do not deal with more than the acquisition of personal names, and, even within this scope, are limited to certain aspects, thus, there is a large number of open questions pertaining to this class of names, which is particularly true for toponyms and the related acquisition of knowledge on the geographical environment. I am confident that this brief overview will help to raise awareness on the importance of studies within the area, and I hope my work will serve as a good foundation for further research.

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**УСВОЕНИЕ ТОПОНИМОВ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ РОДНОМУ ЯЗЫКУ:
ИЗ НАБЛЮДЕНИЙ НАД ПРОСТРАНСТВЕННЫМ МЫШЛЕНИЕМ ДЕТЕЙ**

В статье представлен обзор современных исследований в области усвоения имен собственных. Изучение детской речи позволяет сделать вывод о том, что усвоение имен собственных (антропонимов) происходит одновременно с усвоением нарицательных имен. Однако механизмы, объясняющие последующую дифференциацию этих двух групп существительных, до конца не понятны. По сравнению с овладением антропонимами усвоение ребенком топонимов представляется более сложным и длительным процессом. Исследователи, занимающиеся пространственным мышлением, делают акцент на навыках пространственной ориентации, на локализации пространственной информации в мозге, на освоении «пространственного языка», в то же время почти отсутствуют работы о том, как дети осваивают более широкое географическое пространство и как они усваивают топонимию. Автор статьи предпринимает попытку изучить этот процесс в его начальной фазе. В статье описывается развитие топонимикона двоих детей в связи с освоением ими географических терминов и развитием их способности к пространственной ориентации. Наблюдения, сделанные в ходе исследования, позволяют сформулировать предварительные выводы о специфике когнитивных механизмов, обеспечивающих освоение пространственной среды в раннем детском возрасте. Автор приходит к выводу, что значение наиболее ранних топонимов обычно недостаточно генерализовано: дети

имеют тенденцию интерпретировать имена городов и улиц, сужая их значение до отдельного здания. Также показано, что в возрасте 2–4 лет в сознании ребенка существует неразрывная связь между локусом и человеком (например, дети ассоциируют какое-либо место с определенным человеком). Подобные семантические отклонения могут быть объяснены тем фактом, что у детей в этом возрасте еще не в полной мере сформированы базовые географические понятия (город, улица и пр.) и что элементы пространства еще не являются для них в полной мере отдельными сущностями.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: венгерский язык, усвоение языка, усвоение имен собственных, топонимия, пространственное мышление, когнитивная карта, топонимическое знание.

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