

Figurative language is an important element of everyday conversations. Without comprehending it, it is impossible to participate fully in more complex interactions and communicate effectively. At the same time, it is considered as one of the most difficult features of language. A body of research shows that the way parents communicate with their children influences children's linguistic and social development - it is not clear, however, to which extent this holds also for the nonliteral language.

The presented project focuses on verbal irony, that is an example of figurative language, present in parents' speech directed to their children aged 1-4. Our aim is to investigate how often parents use irony while speaking to their young children at various stages of language development. We expect that it will be less frequent with the youngest children and the number of instances will increase with child's age. We also want to answer the question if comprehension of irony can be trained - that is, if children who were exposed to it frequently, will be more effective between their third and fourth birthday. We also plan to create a classification of ironic statements on the basis of identified ironic utterances.

The study will consist in analysis of video and audio recordings that were collected for three years in six families. The recordings were made every two weeks for an hour in the context of naturalistic interaction in the homes. We will adopt the multimodal approach, that is instead of just looking at semantic information, we will also analyze and take into consideration gestures and other non-verbal behaviors. We will also create a coding scheme for prosody, that is the sound-related features of speech, because elements such as accent or intonation may be important cues that make it possible to identify irony.

The topic of the project is on the one hand an attempt to fill in the gap in knowledge that could help to understand the way children learn to comprehend complex utterances, on the other it is a natural continuation of the studies conducted so far by the PI which were focusing on irony comprehension in preschool children. In the search of causes of variability of this competence in children, it seems justified to investigate the main source of children's linguistic input - that is, their parents.