Nursery Rhymes in Early Speech Development

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Speech development begins at an early age with the acquisition of the sound system and words, followed by the development of phonological awareness, morphosyntactic development and the use of language in communication. One of the most important factors for successful speech development is the child's immediate environment as well as the people they will meet later in life (peers and teachers in preschool). Whatever they are learning, children learn best through play and age-appropriate literary forms (nursery rhymes, songs, chants and stories) and the same applies to speech development. Nursery rhymes are usually short, rhythmic and easy to remember and that is why they are a great help in developing speech in mother tongue and a foreign language. When using nursery rhymes in teaching English as a foreign language it is also useful for the teacher to be aware of the main differences between the Croatian and English language phonetic and phonological systems. The final section of the thesis presents some methods and activities that may facilitate the acquisition of English as a foreign language in preschool age.

Key words: early childhood and preschool age, early speech development, nursery rhymes, English as a foreign language

Malešnice u ranom razvoju govora

SAŽETAK

Govorni razvoj počinje u ranoj dobi usvajanjem glasovnog sustava i riječi, zatim razvojem fonološke svijesti, morfosintaktičkim razvojem i uporabom jezika u komunikaciji. Jedan od najvažnijih preduvjeta za uspješan razvoj govora je djetetova neposredna okolina kao i ljudi koje će upoznati kasnije u životu (vršnjaci i odgajatelji). Što god uče, djeca najbolje uče kroz igru i literarne oblike primjerene njihovoj dobi (dječje pjesmice, malešnice i priče), a isto vrijedi i za razvoj govora. Dječje pjesmice su najčešće kratke, ritmične i lako pamtljive i zato su velika pomoć u razvoju govora na materinskom i stranom jeziku. Pri korištenju dječjih pjesmica u nastavi engleskoga kao stranoga jezika također je korisno da odgojitelj bude svjestan glavnih razlika između fonetskih i fonoloških sustava hrvatskog i engleskog jezika. U završnom dijelu rada prikazane su neke metode i aktivnosti koje mogu olakšati ovladavanje engleskim kao stranim jezikom u ranoj i predškolskoj dobi.

Ključne riječi: rana i predškolska dob, rani razvoj govora, dječje pjesmice, engleski kao strani jezik

1. Introduction

Speech as a form of communication is one of the fastest, most economical and relatively easy ways to convey messages among speakers. For humans, speech perception usually precedes production, and it is interesting that babies prefer the rhythm patterns of their mother tongue (Curtin & Zamuner, 2014). Speech is a skill that is acquired in early childhood, starting with the child's acquisition of the sound system, followed by the acquisition of words and morphosyntactic development and the use of language in communication. In order for speaking to be developed correctly and in a timely manner, the child must be surrounded by other people who communicate with him or her through speech, who encourage the child to understand the messages that are transmitted through speech and encourage the child's attempts to convey his or her own messages through speech.

Nursery rhymes are short, simple, and easy-to-remember songs that children love to listen to and later reproduce through speech, mimicry, gestures and movements. These are mainly old songs that have been handed down through oral tradition, but may also include modern songs and rhymes composed and written with children and for children.

This thesis discusses the development of speech in early childhood and observes some of the factors that contribute to the development of speech in Croatian as the mother tongue, although some characteristics of language development are considered universal, that is, they are not exclusively related to a specific language. The influence of the environment, especially the role of the pre-primary teachers and caretakers in the development of children's speech is mentioned, as well as the importance of phonological awareness.

The next chapter provides an overview of some types of nursery rhymes and their potential use in stimulating speech development with a special emphasis on the role of nursery rhymes in pre-primary mother tongue and EFL acquisition. Finally, it is proposed that due to their simplicity and accessibility, nursery rhymes themselves are a versatile tool that greatly helps children in mastering the skill of speaking, both in their mother tongue and in a foreign language, specifically English.

2. What is speech?

When it comes to speech and language in general, it may be proposed that many people use them as primary forms of communication on a daily basis, especially since speaking is possibly the fastest way of transferring information and messages. According to the definition provided by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, speech refers to "human communication through spoken language. Although many animals possess voices of various types and inflectional capabilities, humans have learned to modulate their voices by articulating the laryngeal tones into audible oral speech" (Arnold, 2024). In other words, the

> term *speech* encompasses one of the media of transferring information by sound. Speech is an exclusively human medium and is the equivalent (although not entirely (…)) of animal vocal communication (both systems use sound). Human speech is a lot more complex than vocal communication between other animals (at least in modern humans), because language is its basis. (Janković & Šojer, 2015, p. 14).

In order to be able to use speech in its full meaning, we need to use the appropriate organs which contribute to creating sounds. These are the muscles in the chest and in the larynx, the vocal tract, and the mouth and nostrils, next there are the pharynx, the soft and the hard palate, the alveolar ridge, the tongue, the teeth and the lips (Roach, 2009). In addition, parts of the central nervous system (areas of the brain, brain cortex and brain stem) also have a significant role in sound and speech production.

> Human speech is served by a bellows-like respiratory activator, which furnishes the driving energy in the form of an airstream; a phonating sound generator in the larynx (low in the throat) to transform the energy; a sound-moulding resonator in the pharynx (higher in the throat), where the individual voice pattern is shaped; and a speech-forming articulator in the oral cavity (mouth). (Arnold, 2024).

We can observe that speech is also closely related to the use of the respiratory system; in fact, speech *is* a form of breathing, known as phonic respiration. "After one takes this deep breath (one or two litres of air), phonic exhalation proceeds slowly and fairly regularly for as long as the spoken utterance lasts" (Arnold, 2024). While breathing is (to put it simply) an exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in our lungs, phonic respiration is a type of breath which is used to produce a spoken utterance.

> The mechanism of phonic breathing involves three types of respiration: (1) predominantly pectoral breathing (chiefly by elevation of the chest), (2) predominantly abdominal breathing (through marked movements of the abdominal wall), (3) optimal combination of both (with widening of the lower chest). The female uses upper chest respiration predominantly, the male relies primarily on abdominal breathing. (Arnold, 2024).

The capability of the tongue is especially significant, in light of the fact that its movement shapes the air extracted from the lungs and in this way frames sounds and larger units – words and sentences (Starc et al., 2004, p. 28).

3. Speech development in children

Majority of children are already born with all the necessary predispositions to successfully master expressing themselves in a spoken language one day. It is through physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological development that children acquire the skills necessary to further develop these predispositions for speaking their mother tongue. According to Starc et al. (2004), children's central nervous system undergoes its most rapid development during the first few years of their life and it is important that during this sensitive period a child has adequate social stimulation which will enable the child to develop speech. In the period from 2 to 12 years of life, the brain has the best predispositions for flexible organization of many cognitive functions, especially those related to speech because of extensive changes in the brain structure and everyday development of new nerve cells. After that period, the flexibility of brain reorganization gradually decreases[1] (Starc et al., 2004, pp. 26-27).

Speech development, according to Starc et al. (2004), involves several aspects such as phonological development, vocabulary (meaning/semantic) development, grammar development, development of communicative (pragmatic) functions, and the development of metalinguistic awareness. In addition, speech development, as many other milestones during a child's formative years happens in various stages and with different length of occurrence. However, researchers have identified two distinctive periods in the child's speech development: preverbal – spanning the time from birth to the first meaningful words (or, according to some authors, even until the first meaningful sentence), and verbal – including the period starting with the first meaningful word/sentence until automaticity in speech processing is achieved (around the age of ten), and beyond (vocabulary enrichment, more complex sentences, cultivating speech) (Starc et al., 2004, p. 27).

As stated above, children start using speech as a way of communication from a very early age. Their speech development will be described according to three age periods: nursery, younger preschool and older preschool age.

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[1] The quotes originally written in Croatian are the author's translations.

3.1. Nursery age

Nursery age refers to the period between a child's birth and three years of age. That is the time of intense and rapid expansion of children's development. In that short period of time, children are born and go from a newborn child with limited possibilities for movement and communication, to a child that can engage in different physical movements, begins to learn prosocial behaviours and begins to talk and tell stories.

Vasta et al. (1998 as cited in Starc et al., 2004) proposed that hearing is particularly significant for the development of speech. It develops as early as intrauterine, and the development of auditory perception is especially significant in the initial two years of a child's life, when they are particularly sensitive to the characteristics of sounds significant for speech perception. According to Šmit (2001, p. 55), the development of motor skills is also of great importance for the development of speech, as well-developed motor skills enable the structuring of rhythm and speech.

When talking about child's speech development, we will refer here to the five phases proposed by Stark (1980): reflexive sounds (0-2 months); cooing and laughter (2-4 months); vocal play (4–8 months); reduplicated babbling (8–10 months); and nonreduplicated babbling and first words (10–14 months). Namely, during the preverbal period, in the first two months of a child's life, children make different crying, giggling, cooing and other sounds to notify the caretaker of their state and their needs (Starc et al., 2004). Then comes the cooing and laughter phase during which the sounds are connected to pleasant feelings. Soon, the cooing will change under the influence of the environment and early communication between the baby and the caretakers (Starc et al., 2004, pp. 27-28). Next comes the vocal play phase, during which a child has greater control of the sounds he or she produces, and imitates the sounds from the immediate environment. Steadily, children begin to join sounds that resemble enunciated words (e.g. ma-ma, da-da) - this is the reduplicated babbling phase, which is followed by the nonreduplicated babbling phase (additional sounds and syllables may be added, e.g. da - ddy).

Between one and two years of age, children's vocabulary, grammar and articulation expand significantly. During this period, the child starts to say the first meaningful words, notices the rhythm and changes in the rhythm of speech, can repeat the words he or she hears, mirrors the sounds from the immediate environment (e.g. an animal, a vehicle); and towards the end of the second year shows that (s)he has grasped the basic imperative verbs "give...", "show...", names body parts, uses negation and descriptive adjectives (Starc et al., 2004). According to Starc et al. (2004), the words a child utters are generally the ones used to name individuals and things from the immediate surroundings, for example, relatives, food, toys, and when accompanying utterances with gestures and intonation, a single word (a holophrase) the child utters may replace a sentence. After the first word, there can be a stagnation in the production of new words, which stops around the eighteen months when there may again be an unexpected vocabulary expansion, known as a naming explosion (Starc et al., 2004) or 'word spurt'. Echolalia is also present in speech: the child repeats the words (s)he hears, yet they are not addressed to anybody, the child simply enjoys pronouncing them (Starc et al., 2004).

Toward the end of the second year, the child creates a very first sentence and starts to consciously combine two words (e.g. "no eat", "mom drink"), which increasingly develops from two to more words. The sentences usually consist of nouns and verbs, the prepositions and conjunctions are missing and the child's speech resembles a wire message, which is why it is referred to as telegraphic speech (Starc et al., 2004, p. 92). Additionally, a child refers to him/herself in third person (e.g. *Jim hungry*, instead of *I am hungry*) and only toward the end of the second year begins using the pronouns *I* and *you*. As for communication, besides words, a child will use gestures (e.g. point with a finger, shake his/her head), respond to simple commands, accompany own actions with interjections, point to objects, use words to request food and drink, accurately answer basic questions (Starc et al., 2004).

Between two and three years of age, children's skills significantly progress in all aspects of their development, but there is also a period of expressed spite and defiance toward nearly everything they are told. When it comes to speech development, Starc et al. (2004, p. 103) say that this is a period of extraordinary dominance of grammar in the sense that the sentences become extended, and the child starts to incorporate additional words that were absent in telegraphic speech. As for

the development of hearing and listening, rhythm and intonation are important for a child in order to be able to understand what is being said, and sometimes this is more important than the content of the message itself. There is still a significant number of mistakes in diction, and for some children lexical dyslalia may develop (e.g. Cro. Zagreb – Zabreg). In vocabulary acquisition overextension and neologisms are observed. Because of the absence of words and experience, the child will use the words (s)he already knows to name what is new to him or her (e.g. dog - is used as a name for a canine as well as for a feline and a rabbit...).

Language development is manifested as the correct use of pronouns and appropriate verb forms for the past, present and future (with some mistakes still noticeable), use of adjectives (including comparison but using incorrect forms for irregular comparison), nouns (uses the plural), and adverbs (adverbs are used incorrectly, e.g. I was at your place tomorrow), use of correct accents, mastery of speech breathing, use of all types of sentences (Starc et al., 2004). The authors also emphasize that the speech of a three-year-old child is comprehensible even to strangers, and serves its basic purpose – communication. A child at this age knows how to look for explanations for certain problems that may preoccupy him or her and can hold a simple conversation about them. Also, the child can recall a short story, memorize several nursery rhymes, and ask to be read his or her beloved stories and fairy tales over and over again, frequently uses question why? to ask for an explanation, but also to draw attention to themselves (Starc et al., 2004). At this age begins the initial comprehension of the significance of written language, i.e. the child perceives that somebody is reading or writing and starts to comprehend that the written symbols carry a message (Starc et al., 2004).

By the end of the preverbal period, the child will have acquired the major functions which facilitate mother tongue acquisition, the most significant of which are intonation and rhythm (Starc et al., 2004, p. 28).

3.2. Younger preschool age

Younger preschool age generally refers to the ages between three and five, and Starc et al. (2004) say that children enter the fourth year with more self-confidence, which may partly be because of the already well-developed speech and communication.

As for the speech development itself, it is rapid during this period and a child's interest in communication is great and present to such an extent that speaking is often more important to them than listening to what is being said (Starc et al., 2004). Phonemic hearing is developed, and the child distinguishes the vowels of the mother tongue which enables them to notice mistakes in the pronunciation of other people and begin to understand opposite concepts such as quiet – loud (Starc et al., 2004). The authors mention some of the most frequent speech deviations that can happen in this period: the replacement of sounds, oversight of the beginning phonemes, relocation of phonemes inside a word/syllable, and assimilation and dissimilation. With reference to vocabulary, a four-year-old child will be able to describe an activity, answer questions like "Which one do you need?" for subjects, and will know his or her full name and age (Starc et al., 2004). The authors also mention that the child's speech is understandable and comparable to that of grown-ups, but warn that there may still be many cases of overextension in grammar (e.g. *I goed there yesterday*.). As for communication, the child has a great interest in communication and language in general -they can now have conversations about events, report on experiences and needs, and ask questions (Starc et al., 2004). The authors also add that the child may verbalize what he or she is doing and may also talk about future actions and his or her plans – they are using external speech which should become internal around the age of six or seven.

According to Starc et al. (2004), the child's communication abilities expand and are observed in the child's telling of longer stories (still mixing reality and imagination), questions with which they try to get information (not just to draw attention to themselves), the appearance of humour in speech and activities, and mostly verbal conflict resolution (there is less hitting or kicking). The authors also say that in this period the child understands and may correctly execute two consecutive commands, and when referring to himself, uses the pronoun "I" and informs the environment about himself and his thoughts. With encouragement, he begins to use expressions

of politeness: please, thank you, welcome, greetings and goodbye, likes to talk to himself and his toys, an imaginary friend will also appear, and there may also be some physiological stuttering (Starc et al., 2004).

According to Starc et al. (2004), a four-year-old child frequently responds in an insubordinate and impudent manner to the requests coming from grown-ups and at times we may even notice the use of swear words and toilet talk (e.g. repeating rhymes and tunes using foul language may be a genuine delight for children of that age). The authors also say that at the age of five, the child's vocabulary increases quickly: they pronounce and articulate all speech sounds smoothly, their grammar barely differs from that of grown-ups, a sentence has at least five words, and they become aware that words comprise sounds and that each written word is an independent unit. At this age, the recognition of rhyme and phoneme analysis occurs (e.g. recognition of the first and perhaps the last phoneme in a word). When they ask questions, children want to establish the meaning of certain words, understand space and time, and acquire the meaning of abstract terms that are at this age still occasionally used incorrectly (Starc et al., 2004). Grammatical development is characterised by the comparison of adjectives, use of all parts of speech when forming a sentence and the ability to talk about causality using *because* (Starc et al., 2004). The authors also mention that in this period the child introduces commands and instructions during play, solves problems by persuasion and negotiation, chooses words to address other children and adults, loves listening to stories and later likes to dramatize them, and discovers questions and riddles. In communication, the child's speech is completely understandable and is not context dependent, the child can talk about past events and think about future events, and they understand more complex and longer sentences, in other words, speech becomes a real means of communication (Starc et al., 2004).

If by the end of the fifth year a child has significant difficulties in pronouncing some phonemes, i.e. if the child replaces, omits or pronounces them in a distorted manner, parents should contact speech therapist and ask for professional help (Starc et al., 2004, p. 133).

3.3. Older preschool age

Older preschool age refers to children aged between five and seven. A five-year-old child is stable, reliable, and has an expressed desire to be a good child and to fulfil the adults' expectations (Starc et al., 2004). Speech at this age is both articulatory and grammatically correct. The child can compare speech sounds by intensity, notice the sound structure of words and begins to notice the first, middle and last sound in a word and some children can even segment a word into phonemes (Starc et al., 2004). The authors also say that the basic grammar is acquired (plural, cases, verb tenses...), sentences are expanded with conjunctions and abstract concepts are mostly named correctly. When communicating with others, children's verbal expression becomes important as it enables them to plan their play, assign roles, or dramatize a story and their interest in different written forms of communication such as letters, words, books is increasing (Starc et al., 2004). They express their emotions verbally, come up with taunts and derogatory names, and offer verbal resistance to the demands of adults (Starc et al., 2004).

At the age of six, a child is often too sure of himself, but as a rule, they are ready for new challenges and adventures (Starc et al., 2004). The authors explain that speech of a six-year-old child relies heavily on expanding what has already been learned: phoneme segmentation is improved, grammatical rules are fully acquired (including exceptions), and sentences are further expanded. As regards articulation, deviations are possible due to the losing baby (primary) teeth, which is corrected after permanent teeth have grown. Communication is expanded as the child successfully initiates and maintains conversation, listens and participates in group conversations, and independently resolves minor conflicts through agreement (Starc et al., 2004).

A seven-year-old child can withdraw into him or herself, prefers to watch and listen without being directly involved, and will thus try to build self-awareness. They may complain and be dissatisfied, but they will mostly assert their rights (Starc et al., 2004).

4. The influence of the environment on speech development

In the process of speech development, the child's immediate surroundings play a major role. The environment in which a child is growing will determine how far and in what direction his or her development will go. Speech is a profoundly social activity (with the exception of interior speech) since it implies communication with others and requires both the speaker and listener to be active.

While observing conversations in their surroundings, children come to understand how important it is to communicate. According to Prebeg-Vilke (1991), already in the first months of life, the child begins to direct their attention to the voice they hear, they turn to the face in front of them, and the voice is progressively becoming important to them - they connect this voice with feeding, bathing, and changing diapers. It is necessary to frequently talk with the child from the first day, because this is how speech will become part of his or her social environment, as the child will use sounds they hear to recognize individuals (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991).

Acquiring one's mother tongue is a lifelong process a person engages in every day through education, work, media and other forms of communication. In this way, a person acquires vocabulary, which they then either use for future communication or simply forget. Formal mother tongue instruction, where the language is both an object of study and means of communication (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991), begins when a child starts primary education although exposure to the standard mother tongue may begin already in kindergarten. Since in kindergarten children are motivated to use language in spoken communication, and many come to kindergarten speaking non-standard forms they have acquired at home, the teacher as a role model needs to ensure that children are exposed to the standard language, especially in older groups (ages five-six/seven). The standard language may be acquired by the child in their environment, i.e. kindergarten, through the exposure to various children's shows and programs on television or even through the stories, picturebooks and fairytales that are read to them. Colloquial and non-standard expressions will also be adopted by the child in the communication with peers in kindergarten or while they engage in conversation with other household members in their home (Škarić, 1988).

By using the language, a mother or another person in the child's environment, guide their focus toward what they consider significant, assist the child in noticing their surroundings and spark their interest. In families where caretakers, siblings and parents include a child in the conversations and activities, and share with them their interests, the child will be given an opportunity to develop their knowledge as well as language skills. At the same time, the way a child perceives individuals, events, books, instruments and many other things from his or her environment may change. As the child develops, it is important to increasingly engage the caretakers in helping them make sense of the world and individuals in their surroundings, and to show understanding for the child's inquiries (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991). Moreover, as the child's utterances become longer, parents may support the correct word order in child's speech by using sentences when speaking with children, encouraging their repetition, and when children make syntactic errors, parents may correct their utterances and encourage the repetition of the correct forms (Rathus, 2000). Prebeg-Vilke (1991) says that conversing with relatives, and later with kindergarten teachers helps children develop imagination and create scenes and events in their mind which they later present using language. Good conditions for the development of speech imply a good relationship between the child and the immediate environment as well as good speech models who will be able to connect the child with the world around them. It is recommended that the year before starting school is devoted to checking the child's pronunciation, because this is the last moment when a therapist can be involved in correcting any speech difficulties (Škarić, 1988).

Everything mentioned thus far does not mean that talking to a child is positive in itself because usually what matters is what was said and how it was said to the child, i.e. if a child is humiliated, mocked or scolded unnecessarily, this can have serious negative consequences for his or her speech and overall development (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991, p. 70).

Theory and practice show that children who use language skilfully do not do so because they have had a good formal education in the area of language and speech development. A child acquires language because it is an integral part of every situation in which they find themselves and in which they learn how to behave appropriately (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991).

4.1. Phonological awareness in preschool children

Phonological awareness is considered to be the ability to perceive and control phonological structures accurately and it has been found to be closely related to phonological processing and reading (Stekić et al., 2023). "That is, phonological awareness is a single, unified ability during the preschool and early elementary school years that manifests itself in different skills throughout a person's development. Thus, there is consensus that phonological awareness refers to one's ability to recognize, discriminate, and manipulate the sounds in one's language, regardless of the size of the word unit that is the focus" (Anthony & Francis, 2005, p. 256). According to Anthony and Francis (2005), various phonological awareness skills incorporate: blending sounds together, segmenting words into their constituent sounds, recombining sounds in words, and deciding whether two words share the same sounds. The authors also propose that specific phonological awareness skills may depend on whether the focus is on syllables or smaller intrasyllabic units (onsets, rimes, or phonemes).

Children first develop awareness of syllables and around the same time, awareness of the first sound in a word. After developing this awareness, children become aware of rhyme, and it is considered a fundamental phonological skill that helps the child recognize phonemes and manipulate them in words (Likierman & Muter, 2007). Studies focusing on speakers of different languages have found that various determinants of the complexity of a spoken language (e.g. saliency and complexity of word structures, phoneme position, and articulatory variables) seem to impact the development of phonological awareness, i.e. children raised in the environment where spoken syllables are highly salient, may develop syllable awareness sooner than the children raised in the environment with less salient syllables (Anthony & Francis, 2005). Vowel and consonant harmony, as phonological principles observed in certain languages that need vowels or consonants in the word to belong to a specific class of vowels or consonants, probably impacts the development of phoneme awareness (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

Another factor that needs to be considered when talking about saliency are phonological neighbours or words that share a same-sounding unit - relative to the other same-sounding words in the same language (e.g. bright, kite, height). These are called rime neighbours, and body

neighbours are words which have the same-sounding onset and vowel combination (e.g. cat, cab, calf). Anthony and Francis (2005) say that children who speak languages that have more rime neighbours than body neighbours (e.g. English) develop onset–rime awareness sooner that the awareness of the final consonant or consonant cluster. Position of a phoneme in a word further adds to the complexity of phoneme awareness. Articulatory factors which are important for the linguistic complexity of words also contribute to the development of phoneme awareness, namely voicing, manner and placement of articulation (Anthony & Francis, 2005). The authors describe voicing as voiced and voiceless sounds (depending on whether the vocal folds vibrate when sounds are produced or not), manner as the direction of air flow in voicing sounds (liquids, nasals, glides and obstruents), and placement as the location where the vocal tract is occluded or narrowed. They also add that learning the names of letters and their corresponding sounds may have an important impact on developing phonological awareness. Hence, children who are learning an alphabetic language that has transparent orthography, i.e. consistent spelling-to-sound and sound-to-spelling relations, may develop phoneme awareness quicker and simpler (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

4.2. Teachers' role in the development of speech

Environment that is secure and offers the child extraordinary chances for investigation is very important for their proper development. Yet, the main factor contributing to an inspiring environment will be individuals – parents, caretakers or teachers who love the child, show them affection, sing and converse with them, and read picturebooks and stories to them.

The teachers need to create a stimulating environment that fosters the development of speaking and pre-reading skills (Čudina-Obradović, 1995). All through the preschool period, teachers should implement exercises that contribute to the development of phonological awareness, for example, "segmenting, blending or changing individual phonemes within words to create new words" (Chard & Dickson, 1999, p. 262). Daily reading to a child from the age of two facilitates their further speech development (Čudina-Obradović, 1995). However, for reading to be effective, a child may not be simply a passive listener – reading needs to be dynamic and

interactive. Before and during reading, children may be asked to comment on what they see and name what they see in the pictures (Čudina-Obradović, 1995). If a child makes a pronunciation or grammar mistake, the teacher should not correct the child but may simply repeat the answer correctly, which gives the child feedback on the accurate language use. It is also important for children to hear praise and encouragement in their attempts to communicate. A more complex level of shared reading should involve asking open-ended questions, expand the child's utterance by repeating their answers and adding a few words (e.g. the child says "cow", the teacher answers: "yes, it's a cow."), and should also include humour, cheerfulness and playfulness that are so important to children (Čudina-Obradović, 1995). Teachers and children may also engage in games and activities that influence the development of the child's knowledge of initial, middle and final sounds, which leads to phoneme segmentation (breaking words into syllables or speech sounds), and later they may do activities that encourage phoneme blending (recognizing words from the given syllables or speech sounds) (Čudina-Obradović, 1995). Encouraging child's language development can be done through expansion (a child says something which an adult expands into a longer, more complex sentence) and reshaping (a child says something incorrectly and the adult reformulates it or just repeats it correctly), as well as reflection and reinforcement (repeating what the child has said correctly and building the conversation from the child's words thus giving the child a positive feedback), developing the child's listening skills, teaching them difficult words and concepts, asking questions and encouraging the child to ask questions and encouraging storytelling (Likierman & Muter, 2007, pp. 183-187). According to Likierman and Muter (2007), while teaching difficult words and concepts, we should be aware that some words name complex concepts and children need to hear such words a few times to comprehend their significance, and to completely comprehend them they should begin using them regularly in speech (examples would be words that portray spatial relations such as up, down, on, underneath, huge, little, behind, in front), or words that depict feelings (cheerful, miserable, scared...). Some of the more difficult language units are questions like who, where, when, why. To comprehend them, it is important for children to initially make sense of what these words mean with numerous examples and their use in communication with children (Likierman & Muter, 2007). Telling stories and providing a sequence of events can serve as one way to stimulate the development of children's speech, creativity and imagination. Teachers should give an example of a story or a sequence of events and then have a

conversation with the child, asking questions and prompting the child to tell the story or arrange the events in a proper sequence (Likierman & Muter, 2007).

5. Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes are present in many cultures and nations across the world. "Nursery rhymes, also known as Mother Goose rhymes, can be broadly defined as short songs and verses often read or sung to, or by, young children" (Galway, 2013). Despite the fact that they have some universal characteristics and there are some similarities in the themes and articulation of the tunes in nursery rhymes originating from different countries and created in different languages, many have their own specific characteristics which convey the features of a specific country and language (Crnković, 1998). The first complete collection of English nursery rhymes was published in 1842 by James Orchard Halliwell under the title *The Nursery Rhymes of England*, and shorter ones were published before (one of the best, *Tommy Thumb*, was published in 1744), while individual rhymes had been recorded since 1609 (Crnković, 1998 p. 8).

The American equivalent for nursery rhymes are Mother Goose rhymes, which were probably created according to the English templates of Perrault's *Tales of My Mother Goose* (Crnković, 1998). The author further explains that in Croatia, these songs appear under several names, one of which is "pjesme iz zabavišta", which corresponds almost completely to the English expression nursery rhymes, if we take "zabavište" to mean "nursery". It was used by Marija Grubešić in the title of a cycle of children's songs published in 1893 in the newspaper "Bršljan" (Crnković, 1998). Throughout the history of Croatian children's literature, there have been many names for nursery rhymes intended for the youngest. Nevertheless, somehow over time the term "malešnice", proposed by Milan Crnković in 1998 in his book "Hrvatske Malešnice" was accepted in literary circles.

In Croatia, there is a moderately rich tradition of Croatian nursery rhymes. The attitude towards them however, as proposed by Crnković (1998) may be considered fairly reckless as there are no comprehensive collections, there are only few or none in the collections of Croatian children's' verse, they are not adequately represented in pre-primary or early primary

education, and they are not categorized. Croatian nursery rhymes have been recorded since the end of the 19th century, although not systematically and rarely as a separate collection (Crnković, 1998, pp. 8-12).

Nursery rhymes may differ in style, subject, tone, and theme; however, what most have in common is the use of rhythm and rhyme that makes them easy to remember (Galway, 2013). The author adds that certain rhymes appear to have been created merely for entertainment purposes, whereas others are didactic and educational (especially those which assist children with the acquisition of letters and numbers). In the early days, a large number of popular nursery rhymes were not intended for children at all, but they were listened to anyway along with various other stories and customs that adults shared with children. They often appear in children's games, and in some way do not allow children to remain passive observers of the game, but draw them into the game (Crnković, 1998). Nursery rhymes are important because words and movements stimulate various senses, which favours the general development of the child; moreover, those first nursery rhymes heard and learned in childhood usually remain imprinted in the memory of most people (Crnković, 1998).

5.1. Types of nursery rhymes

Numerous recognizable nursery rhymes are extremely old and belong to the long oral tradition. Others were first recorded in writing, although the authors may not be known for all. The terms used in the English language to name different types of nursery rhymes are: nonsense rhymes, lullabies, finger-plays, counting-out rhymes, riddles, games, songs, and ballads (Galway, 2013). According to one such categorization, nursery rhymes may belong to one of two groups, depending on what may be learned from them: 1) semantic division - parts of body, people and occupations, animals, clothes, colours, food, flowers, daily activities; and 2) morphological division used to practice morphological or syntactic English language structures (Taçi 2017). In addition to the types of rhymes, different authors and collectors of nursery rhymes in different countries have proposed their own categorization of nursery rhymes. For instance, James Orchard Halliwell, who collected *The Nursery Rhymes of England* (1842) and *Popular Rhymes and Tales* (1849, divided rhymes into antiquities (historical), fireside stories, game-rhymes,

alphabet-rhymes, riddles, nature rhymes, places and families, proverbs, superstitions, customs, and nursery songs (lullabies) (Sukartiningsih & Priyantin, 2010).

Croatian nursery rhymes have always had a specific function depending on their origin and performance. Along with rhythm, sound, rhyme and image, they are used when rocking a child, or to help children fall asleep, learn about the living and non-living environment, recognize animals, in different games, to develop children's imagination, teach about religion, but also for simpler things such as creating a dance, teasing and mocking, transfer of knowledge, etc. (Crnković, 1998). One of the nursery rhyme categories are nonsense rhymes, the opposite of which might be termed as sense rhymes, although Crnković (1998, p. 15) says that this division does not make much sense because almost all Croatian nursery rhymes are essentially sense rhymes in a nonsensical way.

The occurrence of onomatopoeia in nursery rhymes should also be mentioned here. Onomatopoeia, as "the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (such as *buzz* or *hiss*)" may also relate to the use of words whose sound suggests the sense, like in poetry, where a verse can express a feature of the thing portrayed (Britannica, 2024). It is believed that the first examples of human speech are connected with impersonating the sounds of nature, so too a child when first joining a conversation utilizes onomatopoeia. Not only do children initially name animals or objects that make noise based on the sounds they make (e.g. woof woof, meow meow), but they can also create songs based on onomatopoeia that do not necessary refer to a specific animal. Those songs and sounds illustrate how a child perceives a specific animal or thing, sometimes with no association with onomatopoeic expressions related to the sounds; they may also indicate a child's attempt to establish a communication with the animal or to translate what the animal is saying (Crnković, 1998, p. 21). "The research has shown that in English nursery rhymes the majority of onomatopoeia is imitating the sounds of animals and birds (42% of all the songs): *baa, quack, moo, woof, oink, gulp, gobble, waddle*. Imitating sounds of inanimate objects is also quite numerous (32%): *shout, beep, swish, whaa, ding, jingle bells, knock*. Imitating sounds of people are ixed in (sic.) 15% of all the analyzed nursery rhymes: *laugh, sh, burp*" (Riabova & Kobenko, 2015, p. 124).

5.1.1. Counting-out and number rhymes

Counting-out rhymes may be used as an introduction to play and counting. For example, the one who is counting uses gestures and says the words while the others listen carefully for several reasons: so that the one who is counting does not cheat and so that he or she does not skip them in the counting process thus removing them prematurely and unfairly from the game. Hence, active listening is an unwritten rule that everyone must obey to participate, otherwise they might be "deceived". After counting, the children can continue the game. Counting-out rhymes also help develop a feeling of time. By paying attention to the count-out rhyme a few times, a child can quite precisely determine when it is their time to leave or switch in the game. By learning the length of the rhyme, the child knows how to time the final word or syllable in the counting-out rhymes (Šmit, 2001).

Because of the specific rhythm and tempo that the counting-out rhyme has, it has often been considered a musical genre. For this reason, it is suitable for encouraging the development of speech. The content of the counting-out rhyme itself is not so important, what matters are the syllables which are pronounced in a specific rhythm defined by the characteristics of the sounds. We call such rhymes irrational counting-out rhymes. Their length is also important and will depend on children's age (Šmit, 2001). Another universal phenomenon in these nursery rhymes are numbers, usually up to three or ten and the person on whom the last word or syllable falls is either eliminated or assigned a specific role. The rhymes (or songs) are mostly nonsensical because the words that appear usually have nothing to do with the rest of the text. There are many nonsensical examples of rhymes that contain only a few words, and in their distorted form some numbers from different languages or dialects can be found. One of the most famous Croatian nursery rhymes, *En ten tini*, was created from a game, completely nonsense in its current form, but rhythmically and sonically very distinctive and attractive (Crnković, 1998, p. 19).

Some examples of English numbers and counting-out rhymes would be: *One potato, Two potatoes; Five Little Ducks* or *Five Little Monkeys.*

5.1.2. Games – rituals, dancing and finger play

There is a special type of nursery rhymes that seem to be based on the motifs of ancient rituals and prophecies, not so much on songs. Sometimes it is possible to have an undefined number in a series of words that make up the rhyme formula, but the unwritten rule is that the form is built from unrelated words or even nonsense words which together form rhythm and a new meaning (satisfaction, happiness, defiance, etc.) (Crnković, 1998). Foreign words (Latin, Italian, German, Hungarian) can often be recognized in a sequence in these rhymes. The following are examples of initial letter and sound combinations in these nonsensical rhythmic games: *an tan, trn drn, cunge cunge cungeraj, Angele bengele, ara mara, ekete mekete...* (Croatian examples); *hickety, pickety; hickory, dickory, dock...* (English examples). Among the immense number of letter and sound combinations in the English language, there are some that look like Croatian rhymes, so they appear to be connected with them because of accidental or some past sound qualities (e.g. *een, teen, tether, fether - en ten tini; eena, meena, mina, mo - enci, benci ...*) (Crnković, 1998, p. 23).

Children may sing or recite nursery rhymes while holding hands and standing or dancing in a circle. Circle dancing is usually associated with nursery rhymes but is not required. Adults often know how to play games like this when playing with children. *Kolo kolo i šulanca* and *Igra kolo u 22* are the two most widespread songs in the Croatian language that are sung and danced in a circle (Crnković, 1998, p. 25). Examples of English rhymes performed in a circle would be: *Make a Circle* (sung to the tune of *London Bridge is Falling Down*) or *Ring a Ring o'Roses*.

Fingerplays and action rhymes are brief stories — often with rhymes — that are paired with finger or body movements. Fingerplays and action rhymes help toddlers learn about rhyming words and poetry and get them to listen, speak, and pair words with actions (Center for Early Literacy Learning, 2008). The melodies that are chimed during the game with child's fingers are very physical. The pinnacle of joy is accomplished by touching the little finger, which is "jeopardized" by jolting or pulling. The game mostly follows a pattern with each finger getting

its refrain/job/activity and the littlest finger is the one who will be the offended party. In Croatia, the best-known tune is:

Stari palac kruha prosi,

kažiprst ga kući nosi,

srednjak šuti pa se ljuti/što prstenjak sve pojeda,

a mezimac gladan gleda.

The author of this rhyme is Ljudevit Varjačić.

The second most popular finger rhyme is *Križ-kraž*, which in certain regions of Croatia is presumably the first rhyme that is said while playing with a little child.

In England, one of the best-known finger rhymes is *This little piggy* (Crnković, 1998):

This little piggy went to market,

This little piggy stayed home,

This little piggy had roast beef,

This little piggy had none.

And this little piggy went... "Wee wee wee" all the way home.

Two more examples of a fingerplay or finger rhyme in the English language would be *Itsy Bitsy Spider* and *Thommy Thumb*.

5.1.3. Alphabet Rhymes

In this chapter, nursery thymes associated with teaching the alphabet are presented.

> Alphabet rhyme, mnemonic verse or song used to help children learn an alphabet; such devices appear in almost every alphabetic language. Some of the early English favourites are about 300 years old and have served as models for countless variations. (Britannica, 1998).

There was little distinction in the subject matter in these early rhymes. In addition, some were considered inappropriate for children, for instance, "D was a drunkard, and had a red face," "U was a Usurer took Ten *per* Cent," or "Y was a youth, that did not love school" (Britannica, 1998).

Therefore, they were replaced with the widely taught alphabet rhyme of the *New-England Primer,* published by Benjamin Harris in the late 17th century, which combined moral messages with the learning of alphabet (Britannica, 1998).

There are not many recorded Croatian alphabet rhymes. The ones that can be found mostly list just the initial four letters of the alphabet, as is shown in the example of *A Be Ce De pjesma:*

A Be Ce De/mačka prede.

Preko plota miša špota,

Miš se plače za medene kolače (Crnković, 1998).

Unlike Croatia, England has many examples of nursery rhymes that contain all the letters of the alphabet. They were made by English educational professionals as a mnemotechnics for language learning in which spelling is given great attention (Crnković, 1998). Examples of these rhymes would be the *ABC song* and *The Alphabet Tree*:

A B C D E F G,
H I J K L M N O P,
Q R S T U V,
W X Y and Z.
Now I know my ABCs.
Next time won't you sing with me?

5.1.4. Accumulative (cumulative) rhymes

According to Crnković (1998), accumulative rhymes are completely different from other nursery rhymes, primarily because they are lengthy and difficult to recall. As the name suggests, they deliberately list countless words and statements ordering them in series and following specific rules. It is not necessary for accumulated words to be difficult to pronounce; however, excessive repetition can entangle the tongue. In these rhymes, a series of words beginning with a statement or claim is listed and new ones are added until the string of words is long to the point that repeating them without making a mistake is difficult (Crnković, 1998, p. 29).

Croatian example of an accumulative rhymes would be *Pakiram kofer* (Eng. *I am packing my suitcase*), in which the first person starts by introducing one object, then each subsequent person has to repeat the introduction and all of the added words or phrases and add one more item.

The First Day of Christmas is the English song that is almost synonymous with Christmas. It was first recorded in 1780 and is included in all important nursery rhyme collections.

Some authors have questioned if accumulative rhymes should be a subtype of nursery rhymes, but Crnković (1998, p. 31) believes that they should because children enjoy listing (accumulating) words, things, and events when speaking.

These rhymes can even be said backwards starting with the last line.

5.2. Nursery rhymes and phonological awareness

Phonological awareness has already been mentioned in one of the previous sections of this thesis. This chapter will deal with how reading and reciting nursery rhymes to young children may help them develop phonological awareness. According to Danielson (2000, p. 7), rhymes help children:

> (a) learn the intonation patterns of a language (b) learn new words and concepts, (c) understand the basis of learning to read and write, and (d) gain appreciation of poetry. (…) The rhymes help convey the characteristic speech rhythms of the language. There are phrases to chant, nonsense words to mimic and alliterative repetitions to practice.

The beat, stress, sound and intonation are some of the elements that remain in the child's memory and contribute to the development of a language - pitches, stresses and junctures that are essential for effective communication (Danielson, 2000).

Research on the link between nursery rhymes and phonological awareness through different activities was conducted with three-year old children in the USA (Harper, 2011). In the research, the experimental group of children underwent a ten-week phonological awareness training which included visual, auditory, oral language, tactile-kinesthetic and hands-on activities whose objective was to increase children's recall of nursery rhymes. The activities included reciting,

listening, and singing nursery rhymes, children's theatre where children played different roles and dramatized using puppets and costumes, and finally, the use of different manipulative didactic materials such as boards with different textures. Based on the results, the author concludes that early exposure to nursery rhymes helps children build awareness of sound patterns and has a significant impact on their early language development. While listening to and saying nursery rhymes, children develop phonological awareness, become more sensitive to phonemes and rhyme and develop early literacy skills (Harper, 2011).

According to Danielson (2000), the implementation of nursery rhymes by teachers can support the development of concepts of rhyme and skill to detect rhyme in words and verses as well as help children develop the concept of print. Moreover, rhymes can assist children in becoming aware of the speech to print match (Danielson, 2000, p. 9). When children are given an opportunity to speak, sing, and read aloud, it facilitates their understanding and use of spoken and written language (Harper, 2011).

> Nursery rhymes are a socially engaging, playful, and developmentally appropriate way for young children to hear, identify, manipulate, and experiment with the sounds of language. Integrating nursery rhymes, jingles and chants, and other traditional literature into the early childhood curriculum contributes to a linguistically rich environment in which young children are exposed to the rich vocabulary, syntactic complexity, and decontextualized language contained within the English language. (Harper, 2011, p. 76).

From what is shown, it can be seen how nursery rhymes can be well connected with different activities and thus contribute even more to the development of children's phonological awareness and speech.

6. Differences between the English and Croatian language: Phonological and phonetic levels and lexis

Even though the English language is becoming increasingly common in Croatia, and despite its lingua franca status, it still appears difficult for some Croatians to understand and use it in speech and writing. Therefore, many parents recognize the importance of proficiency in English and insist that their children start learning it from a very young age. As the EFL acquisition and learning process at pre-primary age should predominantly resemble activities implemented in mother tongue acquisition (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006), it is recommended that the EFL teaching should also be based on the use of songs, nursery rhymes, stories and play (Mourão & Ellis, 2020). This chapter will thus primarily focus on the phonological and phonetic differences and similarities between the English and Croatian language and some vocabulary examples, as these are the most closely connected with nursery rhymes.

Both languages belong to the Indo-European family of languages, but English is part of the Germanic group, and Croatian belongs to the Slavic group of languages. Croatia became an independent republic in 1991, and since then the sole official language has been Croatian. Although there are three dialects of the Croatian language—Štokavian (Shtokavian), Kajkavian, and Čakavian (Chakavian), Štokavian is currently the accepted standard language. Originally heavily influenced by Latin, the Croatian language has also been significantly exposed to Italian, German, Turkish, and Hungarian, mainly as a result of the region's historical ownership by several empires and states (Herceg, 2019).

The English language has also been influenced by a number of languages throughout the history, namely, Latin and Greek, Scandinavian, French, as well as more than 300 other languages (Potter & Crystal, 2024). The English language belongs to languages with regular rhythm, in the sense that there is a tendency for stressed syllables to alternate at approximately regular intervals, regardless of how many unstressed syllables there are between stressed ones, and Croatian belongs to languages in which the rhythm is primarily established based on the length of the syllables (Narančić-Kovač & Andraka, 1999). Due to such a rhythm of the English language, changes in the pronunciation of certain words in connected speech are especially emphasized.

These are, above all, the reduction of vowels in unstressed syllables, the joining of words and the resulting sound changes, for example the elision of some consonants (Narančić-Kovač & Andraka, 1999).

One of the main characteristics of the English language is its open vocabulary, that is, it is characterized by "free admission of words from other languages and the ready creation of compounds and derivatives" (Potter & Crystal, 2024). When talking about the openness of vocabulary in Croatian, it is important to mention code-switching, i.e. although the elder people in Croatia are not very open to the use of internationalisms and prefer the established Croatian words, the younger generations have been quite free in incorporating words from other languages, especially English, into everyday communication in their mother tongue which has resulted in an ever increasing number of terms from English being regularly used by Croatian speakers (Herceg, 2019).

According to Ribičić Baćić (n.d.), some of the most common and obvious differences between the English and Croatian languages are certainly in the pronunciation of certain sounds or sound groups. These are differences, for example, in the pronunciation of individual letters (e.g. g and j; j is pronounced as y in the word yes), then the absence of silent letters in the Croatian language (letters that are not pronounced in certain words), while in English there are words that have silent letters. Another difference between these two languages, as stated by Ribičić Baćić (n.d.), is that the Croatian language has three examples of combined letters that form one sound (dž, lj, nj) and are kept as separate letters in the Croatian alphabet, while there are no examples like that in the English alphabet. In the Croatian language, each letter has its own sound and is always pronounced the same, while in the English language most letters may be pronounced in many different ways (Ribičić Baćić, n.d.). The author also emphasizes that in the Croatian language there is something called a diacritic mark above certain letters, again, something that is part of a letter and does not indicate an accent, and these letters are also kept as separate letters in the alphabet (e.g. č, ć, š, ž). The Croatian alphabet is made of 30 letters and the English language, on the other hand, contains 26 letters, but there are 44 unique sounds that can be made from those characters. In many cases, there are overall principles that ought to be followed; nonetheless, training is necessary for a person to learn and understand how to pronounce each letter in the right way (Herceg, 2019, pp. 20-21).

If the texts of songs or nursery rhymes are used to teach English, it is important to keep in mind the differences between regular connected speech and rhythmic speech as in songs and rhymes. They will take something away from the connected speech but also add something. The most important feature that the song or rhyme takes away from the speech is the intonation variety, which is absent due to the complete subordination of the text to the rhythm of the song. That is why rhythmic speech is not helpful when we process intonation patterns (dialogues, jokes, dramatization, etc. are more helpful here) (Narančić-Kovač & Andraka, 1999). The next thing that a song can take away from a speech is the possibility of pronouncing some meaningful elements (due to the rhythmic control of the song) which are transmitted in connected speech by changes in the rhythm in the tonal units of the message (e.g. the hierarchy of importance of individual meanings) (Narančić-Kovač & Andraka, 1999). What the songs adds to the speech is the emphasis on syllables that are otherwise unstressed in the connected speech, or lengthens the syllable if there is a need for it in the verse (Narančić-Kovač & Andraka, 1999). The song adds repetition of certain elements that are suitable when we need to practice pronunciation: the repetition is purposeful, meaningful, and practicing the elements that are common to both song and speech is no longer boring but becomes natural (Narančić-Kovač & Andraka, 1999). According to Narančić-Kovač and Andraka (1999), the elements that are repeated are certainly the pronunciation of individual sounds in the phonological context, elision of consonants and reduction of vowels.

7. Nursery rhymes as a tool for teaching English as foreign language in pre-primary age

The primary objective of very early (pre-primary) EFL teaching is to help a child develop into a bilingual grown-up speaker. However, following numerous studies investigating success at language acquisition at different ages, there has been a great deal of controversies about the ideal age for beginning foreign language instruction (Murphy, 2014, Prebeg-Vilke, 1991, Robinson et al., 2015) and whether foreign language acquisition should begin before the child has acquired the phonetic system in the mother tongue.

Regardless of the onset age, in order for very early foreign language acquisition to be successful, there are certain conditions that should be guaranteed and some will be mentioned here.

To teach a foreign language at an early age, it is necessary to be familiar with different teaching methods as well as characteristics of child development. "There are several teaching methods which keep children's attention and concentration at this age. They are as follows: method of practical works; method of drawing and conversation; method of singing and reading poems; method of total physical response" (Frydrychova Klimova, 2013, p. 504). The methodological guide for teaching EFL in pre-primary age states the following ten rules that should be considered and followed: "1. ability to understand; 2. exploitation of games and movement; 3. indirect teaching; 4. development of imagination; 5. activation of all senses; 6. changing of activities; 7. reinforcement; 8. individual approach; 9. use of native language; 10. use of positive motivation" (Frydrychova Klimova, 2013, p. 504).

Another important factor is to guarantee the continuity of learning, i.e. young children learn languages quite fast, but they also quickly forget them, which is why they need to be provided with continuity of foreign language instruction. Among the most important conditions is that the language teacher has high teaching competences, i.e. they need to be highly competent in the area of early childhood development (understand children's cognitive abilities, developmental stages, etc.), have high level of proficiency in the language and be proficient in FL teaching methodology for very young learners (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991, Alexiou, 2020). Teachers' competence is important among other, because they need to know how to make

children's language learning experience as enjoyable as possible, but also to make sure that each child achieves their full potential. One of their tasks is to select the appropriate vocabulary that children will learn, in other words, they should attempt to choose the words close to children's experiences such as words related to children's background knowledge, such as words about family, animals, food, colours, weather, etc. (Taçi, 2017). It is recommended that these are the words they already know from their mother tongue. In the event that the words relate to concepts that children are unfamiliar with, the concepts should be presented using different aids and media, such as pictures, realia, etc. (Prebeg-Vilke, 1991).

It is notable that children at the age of five to seven years can absorb great amounts of knowledge connected with various fields and life experiences. The most ideal way to motivate them to acquire the English language is by acquainting them with English nursery rhymes which are about alphabet, numbers, family, colours, body parts, etc. These rhymes should be accompanied with additional materials, exercises and activities that children engage in during their stay in kindergarten such as, running, moving, making paper toys, and so on (Sukartiningsih & Priyantin, 2010). The significance of nursery rhymes is primarily in their potential for teaching English vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical structures (Taçi, 2017). Some of the important features of nursery rhymes that contribute to the acquisition of English as a foreign language are the brevity of rhymes, simple vocabulary, themes close to children's everyday life and repetition as a favourite format.

These are some examples of English nursery rhymes with some activities that could be used with them:
1.
Eeny, meeny, miny, moe,
Catch a tiger by the toe.
If he hollers, let him go,
Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.
The rhyme can be used as an introduction to a game to determine the roles in the game or an activity.

2.

Head, shoulders, knees and toes,

knees and toes

Head, shoulders, knees and toes,

knees and toes

And eyes and ears and mouth and nose

Head, shoulders, knees and toes,

knees and toes.

This nursery rhyme can serve as a simple and fun way to teach younger children the naming of individual body parts. Also, it can be adapted, and some body parts can be replaced or added, or it can be slowed down or accelerated, depending on the age of the child.

3.

The itsy bitsy spider climbed up

the waterspout.

Down came the rain

And washed the spider out.

Out came the sun

And dried up all the rain

And the itsy bitsy spider climbed

up the spout again.

This rhyme can also be learned as a fingerplay rhyme. The hands and fingers are used to mimic a spider, and by moving the hands up and down, the children gesture spider climbing up the gutter.

The repeated text can change from a word to a simple phrase and at the end to a complex sentence. Apart from singing, nursery rhymes include movement, role playing, pretend play or gesturing. All these activities can be implemented so that they resemble the real world, i.e. what happens inside the classroom may reflect what they can experience outside (Taçi, 2017).

Here are few examples of English nursery rhymes with activities that could be used with them:

1.

Rain, rain, go away,

Come again another day,

Little Arthur wants to play,

Rain, rain go away.

The song is short, so the teacher could come up with a short choreography while the children stand in a circle, or they could come up with hand movements that would make the rain go away.

2.

The wheels on the bus go round and round

Round and round

Round and round

The wheels on the bus go round and round

All through the town

The wipers on the bus go "Swish, swish, swish"

"Swish, swish, swish"

"Swish, swish, swish"

The wipers on the bus go "Swish, swish, swish"

All through the town

The driver on the bus goes "Move on back"

"Move on back"

"Move on back"

The driver on the bus goes "Move on back"

All through the town

The people on the bus go up and down

Up and down

Up and down

The people on the bus go up and down

All through the town

The horn on the bus goes "Beep, beep, beep"
"Beep, beep, beep"
"Beep, beep, beep"
The horn on the bus goes "Beep, beep, beep"
All through the town

The baby on the bus goes "Wah, wah, wah"
"Wah, wah, wah"
"Wah, wah, wah"
The baby on the bus goes "Wah, wah, wah"
All through the town

The mommies on the bus go "Shh, shh, shh"
"Shh, shh, shh"
"Shh, shh, shh"
The daddies on the bus go "Shh, shh, shh"
All through the town

Using hand and arm movements or involving the whole body, children can imitate the actions mentioned in the song. In addition to movement, a bus model can be made from a cardboard box, the roles can be assigned to the children and the children can take their places on the bus and sing this song (again they can imitate the actions from the song using their body).

In addition to being an excellent tool for encouraging speech development, rhymes can also be a means of promoting and developing cultural competence and pluriculturality. The educational context enables students to understand their own culture as well as that of the *other* while becoming a point of shared cultural reconstruction (all cultures are joined to become a new culture belonging to all) (Bernabé Villodre, 2014). There are a number of nursery rhymes and activities teachers can use to address the topic of culture and cultural diversity. Some examples are *Frère Jacques* (France), *Kookaburra* (Australia), *I have Two Hands* (Philippines) and others.

Learning a foreign language can be quite demanding for children, especially if they are not yet fluent in their mother tongue. Therefore, it is important to work with children and help them develop their listening skills, in addition to speaking skills. One of the activities that could be used with nursery rhymes to encourage children to listen more carefully is "Listen and repeat". These activities are extraordinarily enjoyable and allow children the opportunity to guess the language: the sounds, the stress, rhythm and the pitch. They can be combined with movements (along with objects or images) to help in establishing the connection between the word and its meaning (Sukartiningsih & Priyantin 2010). Some of the recommended basic guidelines for introducing nursery rhymes in foreign language learning are: if a rhyme mentions a body part, touch it, shake it, twist it, tickle it...; if there is picture of the word the teacher is saying, it should be pointed out; in the event that there is an activity mentioned, it should be gestured or mimicked; and whenever possible, the rhyme should be sang (Sukartiningsih & Priyantin 2010). When introducing a nursery rhyme for the first time, children will probably participate only by dancing, and will join in with singing later. Children may make certain phonological or pronunciation mistakes which they will probably, without noticing and with the help of the teacher and peers, correct through repeated singing or reciting the nursery rhyme. In addition, by participating in the activities related to rhymes, or just singing the rhyme, children may unconsciously acquire new English words and their meanings (Taçi, 2017). It is important that children enjoy speaking in English and have a feeling of accomplishment (Sukartiningsih & Priyantin 2010).

All that has been stated previously in this thesis implies that children have a wide variety of ways to participate in learning and performing nursery rhymes in a foreign language, which can give them a sense of satisfaction and happiness while using English as a foreign language.

CONCLUSION

Speaking is a complex skill that requires a lot of time, work and effort. Speech development is closely related to the development and functioning of the central nervous system and relevant respiratory mechanisms. Due to the plasticity of its neurological system, a child is most susceptible to external influences from their immediate environment in early childhood. Therefore, the parents' relationship with the child, their care for the child, communication with them from the earliest days, the environment, which must be interesting, safe and stimulating for the child, all greatly influence how the speech of a small child will develop.

One of the foundations not only for the development of speech, but also the foundation of pre-reading skills necessary for further language development, education in general and advancement in life is the development of phonological awareness. This can be achieved if children are exposed to the appropriate sources and activities. Different children's songs, especially nursery rhymes, are an excellent tool to encourage them to express themselves through facial expressions, gestures, body movements, but primarily through speech. By bringing the world closer to children, they may also be used to teach children vocabulary and cultural concepts. Children's songs and rhymes are mostly traditional and passed down through generations, but they may also be newly created for educational purposes to raise the quality of child's development. In their versatility, rhymes can be used for general educational purposes, but they are most valuable for language development, both in the mother tongue and a foreign language, especially English, because the English-speaking world has a large pool of nursery rhymes, most of which are suitable for language learning.

Of all the activities we can do with children, learning and reproducing different songs through speech, movement and gestures appear to be greatly cherished by them.

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