

## **Mariam KOBERIDZE**

Gori State University  
53 Chavchavadze Str., Gori, 1400, Georgia  
E-mail: maikoberidze@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6604-1628>

## **Tinatin MSHVIDOBADZE**

Gori State University  
53 Chavchavadze Str., Gori, 1400, Georgia  
E-mail: tinikomshvidobadze@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3721-9252>

### **STAGES AND LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN UNDER SIX YEARS OF AGE.**

Numerous problems of children's speech development and the constant interest of linguists determined the relevance, purpose and methodological foundations of the scientific work of the authors of the article — to investigate and study the psycholinguistic aspects and cognitive foundations of speech development of preschool children, to identify the causes of obstacles in speech development, to find ways to solve the problem of speech disorder and to develop recommendations for improving results. The problems outlined in the article were studied using the methods of descriptive, historical-comparative and critical analysis. In particular, various theories and scientific literature related to modern problems and stages of speech development of children under six years of age are considered and rethought. These stages (pre-speech stage, one-word stage, two-word stage, sentence pronunciation stage) correspond to phonemic, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic aspects. It turns out that all children, regardless of their linguistic affiliation, acquire speech habits, phonemic units, sound meanings in the same sequence. The tools for studying the language development of such children should be different for different languages, since language development disorders manifest themselves differently, and their markers are not universal. In this regard, the Georgian speech system is distinguished by a specific phonetic system and grammar.

This scientific work will lay the foundation for the emergence of innovative approaches and theories related to language development disorders in children under six years of age in modern psycholinguistics, and will also help individuals and specialists interested in studying this problem to develop strategies for improving children's language development and apply them in practice.

**Keywords:** Child, language, speech, developmental stages, psycholinguistics, problem.

The issue of child language development is a global problem. Therefore, every study that addresses this issue is relevant from a linguistic point of view.

Psycholinguistics, a discipline close to psychology and linguistics, studies mechanisms involved in the process of speaking and understanding a language, psycho-physical and neuro-linguistic factors influencing the development of a

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child's speech: such as age, gender, genetic disorders, autism spectrum, and others [Mindadze : 5–10].

Some studies confirm that in language development disorders, different languages have different manifestations, depending on the difficulty of the particular language, cf. the comparison of narratives of Georgian 3 to 5-year-old children with narratives of Spanish, German, English, and Jewish children, describing the picture of a situation, in [Imedadze : 1–63].

The Georgian language system has highly specific pronunciation, intonation, phonetics, and lexical arrangement. Cognitive analysis proves that typical errors in the mastering of the Georgian language are caused by difficulties in the phonetic and articulatory control, and grammatical problems are caused by a deficit related to the positional ring [Gamkrelidze, Kiknadze, Shaduri, Shengelaya : 472–486].

Although the speech defect is to some extent can be related to a genetic disorders, it has been proven that early intervention and rehabilitation gives very good results regarding the language component and the verbal behavior component [Dogadze 2022 : 4–10].

The purpose of this article is to study psycholinguistic aspects and cognitive foundations of language development in Georgian-speaking preschool children, to identify the causes of language development impediments, to find ways to solve the problems, and to develop recommendations to improve outcomes.

Accordingly, the goal of our paper is to identify problems that hinder the language development of children under the age of six. How does the specificity of the Georgian language influence children's language development? What types of mistakes do they make and what causes them? Does the genetic or physiological factor cause the speech disorder? How does a child produce different language constructions? What stages can we encounter in language development? By describing the characteristics of the child's language development and finding specific problems, we can help specialists develop strategies to improve the child's language development and use them in practice.

Several sciences can study the same object. For example, language is studied by linguistics, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, neurology, etc. Each of them selects a different theoretical or practical aspect of language as the subject of their research and, accordingly, when studying the phenomenon of language, they rely on different theories, use different means of research and different tools.

The permanent problem is to find out the mechanism that is the basis of a child's speech. Despite the fact that the child's mental data seems to be somewhat limited, s/he completely masters most complex structures of his native language in just 3–4 years. Moreover, s/he easily connects certain grammatical regularities to each specific case of using the native language and soon becomes a full-fledged member of the linguistic community: s/he can already generate and understand an infinite number of new sentences of the native language.

Different theories strive to explain the process of language acquisition by a child. Each assumes that a child enters an environment stimulating language development with some degree of readiness. Opinions differ, however, regarding the question: is this readiness universal, or does it depend on the peculiarities of a particular language? Does this readiness specifically concern language acquisition, or is it of a more general character? [Meadow : 1–8].

According to the behaviouristic theory, until the 1950s, language was considered in the context of every kind of behaviour, and it was believed that the process of its acquisition obeyed the same rules: associative learning, reinforcement

and imitation. For example, associative learning refers to the general process of learning when new information is associatively linked to a specific stimulus. In this way, the acquisition of new words by the child was explained as the child associatively connecting the audio stimulus with the visual one. Imitation and reinforcement were also seen as key mechanisms in the acquisition of grammatical 'rules'. For instance, what is the reaction of other people to the sentences children say? Do children only say the words and sentences that their parents approve of? In this sense, children should use only those sentences that they have pronounced correctly and will no longer say those that have not been approved by their parents due to mistakes in them. There are several problems with this. First, parents usually do not assess what the child says grammatically. They are motivated to respond to content, not form [Brown, Hanlon : 11–35].

According to nativist views, the foundation of each person's use of language is the knowledge of the underlying system of abstract rules that the child acquires in the process of language acquisition. [Meadow : 1–8].

In opinion of Noam Chomsky, a child acquires the system of language, which is a set of subtle and abstract principles, without explicit teaching. Accordingly, he came to believe that if there are no appropriate environmental conditions that would have conditioned the process of language acquisition by the child, then the explanation should be sought in the possibility of innate syntactic knowledge and the existence of specific procedures for language learning. [Chomsky : 26–58]. The problem with nativist theory is that there may be certain principles underlying a particular language that are unique to that language and not shared by other languages.

Social-cognitive theory claims, the specific processes underlying a particular language may be carried out through the involvement of larger, more general learning mechanisms [Bohn, Zimmermann, Call, Tomasello : 41–48].

The constrained learning approach (Constrained Learning) gives priority to statistical learning in the process of language acquisition by the child. According to this view, children are very sensitive to the information received from the environment and can analyse it statistically, which means quantifying the simultaneous appearance of elements. In this way, they can detect repeating patterns. In this, the question arises: is the mechanism that a child can use in the process of language acquisition specific to the language, or does the same regularity occur in other areas? Some authors believe that statistical processing of information is a general, universal means for analysing information received from the environment [Slone, Johnson : 356–364].

These theories are influenced by the cultural values and belief systems of a particular time. However, the «life expectancy» of a theory depends on scientific confirmation. In other words, all theories must be tested using an unbiased set of research procedures agreed upon by the scientific community.

Child development theories have different views on what children are and how they develop. Child development research offers no single definitive truth, as researchers do not always agree on appropriate generalizations of observations. Children are complex creatures, evolving physically, cognitively, emotionally and socially. So far, no theory has been able to combine and explain all these aspects. Nevertheless, the existence of multiple theories enriches modern knowledge as researchers continually attempt to support, refute, and unify these divergent views [Berki : 11–12].

While working on this scientific paper, the historical-comparative, descriptive and critical analysis methods have been used.

Using the descriptive analysis method, we have identified problems related to the child's language development and its stages; using the historical comparative method, we have chronologically studied theories and opinions related to language development. Using the critical analysis method, we formulated conclusions and recommendations based on the critical analysis of language development theories, the latest scientific literature, and empirical materials.

Language is an integral part of our daily life. We use it as naturally and effortlessly, as we breathe or walk. Through language, we express our wishes, thoughts, needs, and plans. Most children acquire language automatically. As a rule, moderate linguistic stimulation is enough for a child to become a competent user of the language by the age of four. Therefore, we easily forget how difficult and complex a phenomenon we are dealing with, and we remember it when we meet a person who, for example, speaks, but is not understood or, on the contrary, does not understand why his peers are laughing or what the teacher is asking him to do.

In psycholinguistic studies, the issue of language acquisition occupies an exceptionally large place. Psychologists and linguists alike are interested in what processes are the basis for mastering the native language or learning a foreign language, for acquiring linguistic knowledge. Indeed, how does a child learn such a complex system as language in such a short time? What phases or stages does a language learner go through? How does a child learn so easily while it is so difficult for adults trying to master a foreign language? When does language learning end? When do we know we know a language? What is the connection between learning native and foreign languages? What is the relationship between language and culture?

In everyday parlance, we use «language» and «speech» as synonyms. For example, when we want to describe the language development of a child, we say: «Nino speaks perfectly, while David is late in speaking», or «Lela does not speak, but she is already two years old». In professional terminology, language possession and speech are two different concepts that are closely related to each other, but conceptually different from each other; therefore, when talking about the disorder of language development, it is necessary to separate language and speech. For example, a person may have difficulty acquiring language or speech, or both. Language means possessing a vocabulary and knowing the rules of grammar, speech – pronunciation of words, articulation (correct pronunciation of speech sounds using the mouth, lips and tongue), tone of voice, and rhythm of speech. However, it is also possible to communicate in sign language. To explain simply, language is a mental phenomenon, and speech is one of its forms of manifestation.

Regarding this issue, there are different opinions in psycholinguistics. The famous linguist Ferdinand de Saussure first expressed the idea of opposing language and speech [Saussure : 2–15; Koberidze : 48–51].

Four stages can be distinguished in the process of language development, namely: the prespeech stage, the one-word stage, the two-word stage, the telegram style.

1. The pre-speech stage. Before the child utters the first word, he makes individual sounds. Interestingly, children of different linguistic affiliations show great similarities in the process of mastering the phonological systems of their languages. It can sometimes take several years for a child to fully master the

phonological system of their native language, but the initial stages of acquisition are universal and the same for all languages. The child acquires the phonological system in a certain sequence and shows an amazing systematicity during acquisition.

During the first three months, the child's articulatory behaviour is mainly limited to screaming. From the fourth month, the child begins to produce the first sounds, rather, streams of sounds, including sounds that are foreign to the child's immediate language environment. After a certain period, children no longer make articulate sounds. This period can last for several weeks, and after that, they begin to speak properly, that is, they utter their first words. A child's first words are usually vowel-consonant alternations and are most often presented in the order /baba/, /mama/, /papa/. Such a development is confirmed in practically all language groups and is considered a universal regularity.

According to Roman Jakobson, the above-mentioned regularity stems from the nature of language. He called this phenomenon the principle of maximum contrast. The beginning of speech development with pronouncing /pa/, /ma/ sounds has an articulatory basis. The /a/-sound is a vowel that is pronounced with the mouth as wide open as possible, while the /p/-sound is a labial sound that is pronounced with the mouth open as wide as possible. That is, when pronouncing /pa/, by the principle of maximum contrast, the maximum opening and closing of the mouth oppose each other; in addition, the vowel-consonance of the sounds also oppose each other [Jakobson : 253–254].

As we mentioned above, from the fourth month, children intensively start pronouncing different sounds. Interestingly, some sounds characteristic of this stage (for example, «l» and «r», which are pronounced quite clearly) are rarely found in the first words of the child.

This process appears to be biologically determined, as the same phenomenon is observed in children who are deaf from birth produce such sounds until about six months of age, and then gradually stop producing them. [Arevadze, Demetradze, Kochauri, Kazaishvili, Dzamukashvili : 15–25].

It is assumed that at this stage, the child learns to group sounds and transform them into melody (intonation). Children of this age not only «speak» spontaneously but also react to their parents' voices. Parents often address infants with a language different from normal speech, characterized by overly soft, caressing intonations (infant-directed speech). Experimentally [Cooper, Aslin : 1584–1595], it is proved that babies are more attracted to this kind of caressing speech. In this experiment, two-day-old children were addressed with two types of speech registers: ordinary, «adult-directed» language (adult-directed speech) and caressing language directed at children. The same experiment was also performed on one-month-old children. Caressing was found to hold the attention of both groups of children longer, as measured by gaze fixation duration. Another experiment also confirms that children distinguish such an address from ordinary speech and pay more attention to it.

Forty-eight four-month-old infants were exposed to the «caressing language» of other children's mothers addressing them and then to the normal, ordinary speech of the same mothers. The majority of children clearly distinguished the «caressing language», as they began to look for the source of the sound, turning their heads in the direction of the sound to determine where the sound was coming from; and when listening to «caressing language», the «intensity» of the search was higher than during normal speech [Fernald : 118–119].

At the age of one year, children usually pronounce their first word.

2. The one-word stage. A child begins to speak at the age of about one year, when he utters his first word. As a rule, this word is a specific noun. The first words of the child denoting mother, ball, car etc. refer to those people or objects that play a special role in the child's life and are connected with his immediate surroundings: they move, make a sound, or are played with by the child. The peculiarity of a child's first words is that children usually use them with multiple meanings. When a child, for example, says the word «ball», he can mean not only a ball but all round objects: the moon, a clock, a plate etc. The child only slowly begins to associate this word with a real ball. So, for example, one-and-a-half-year-old Nino first called a candle «fua» (the word «fua» came from imitating the sound of a candle being extinguished by blowing on it), then this word referred to everything that shines: the sun, the moon, the lighting of a room chandelier, car headlights, etc. Before the age of three, it is common to expand the meaning of the word in this way. Such a phenomenon is called generalization. Generalization can take place in two directions: if the child calls all animals «dog» (i.e. a dog, a cat or a bird) then we are dealing with the phenomenon of overgeneralization. If the child calls «dog» only the neighbour's Caucasian shepherd, then we are dealing with a narrowing of the meaning, the phenomenon called undergeneralization.

It is not difficult for parents to understand the child's language behaviour. Often, by pronouncing the same single word, children make their demands when they want to master a subject or want to play with someone. Sometimes, they make a kind of assumption about an object when they name it (most of the time, they point their hand towards it), and they seem to ask the elders to confirm that this object is indeed called what they think. In fact, a child's one-word utterances are syntactic units because they stand for a sentence; one-word expressions are, in principle, complete sentences. These are not abbreviated sentences used by adults. Often, the same word uttered by a child has a different intonation – affirmative or interrogative; accordingly, a word spoken by a child can have different meanings depending on the intonation. For example: *Booth* «This is a ball»; *Booth?* «Is this a ball»? *Booth!* «Give me the ball» etc.

As can be seen from this observation, in this stage of language development, intonation is of crucial importance. Often, when the mother or the person to whom the child addresses does not respond, the child tries to make her understand what he has to say by repeating the word many times and with increased intonation.

3. The stage of two words. From about 18 months of age, children begin to combine words into two-word expressions, which, just as in the one-word stage, require context to be understood. «Mama car» can mean «Mom, bring me a car», «Mom, draw me a car», «Is this car mine?», etc. It is often said that the transition from the one-word stage to the two-word stage is caused, on the one hand, by the increase in the experience (knowledge) of the child; and on the other hand, by the need to formulate the thought more precisely to avoid mistakes during interaction. It is questionable, however, how valid the second argument is, since the one-word stage «car» is, given the situation and intonation, just as intelligible (or unintelligible) as the two-word «mother machine». The transition to the two-word stage will be conditioned by the psycho-physical development of children. It has been observed that children of a year and a half can often produce longer sequences of sounds than single or two-word utterances [Mindadze : 5–10].

In our opinion, at this stage, the child's speech is not only a sequence of sounds, but also a cognitive action. In this case, mental development, in particular

the development of memory ability, must play a big role. The length of sentences produced and perceived also depends on memory. It can be seen that some words are used much more often and are mostly found only in certain positions.

The analysis of such two-word sentences shows that when connecting words, the child divides them into two classes: one is pivot words, or operators, and the other is numerous words that are initially used in one-word sentences.

For a Georgian child, the supporting word can be «want», which is connected with other words in a two-word sentence: «I want mother», «I want father», «I want milk», «I want dad» etc. The number of supporting words increases slowly. Only a few new keywords appear per month. In addition to supporting words, other words can also be found in a one-word sentence. Observations in this domain show that the child's two-class system of speech does not correspond to the word-class system of adults. The child independently creates simple relationships within the limited vocabulary s/he has already mastered. Research has shown that the number of two-word sentences increases by month approximately as follows: 14, 24, 54, 89, 350, 1400, 2500. Therefore, a very large number of new word combinations are created in a short time. [Gamkrelidze, Kiknadze, Shaduri, Shengelaya : 480–482].

Base-word constructions also perform a variety of semantic functions in a child's speech. These are the basic functions that characterize human speech in general. They appear in the speech of children of various cultural groups. The child's producing of two-word sentences demonstrates universal and unique characteristics present in the child's speech: 1. place, name («there, father, here, mother»); 2. request, command («some porridge, some milk»); 3. rejection (*Lela* «no»); 4. description of the situation or event («father is sleeping»); 5. expression of belonging («Dato's car, my ball»); 6. definition of quality («the car is big»); 7. question («where is mother?»). These are subordinate clauses.

4. The telegram-style stage. After the two-word stage, children move on to the telegram style. These kinds of sentences consist of many words (mainly nouns and verbs), but tense and person markers are hardly used. For example, «I forgot», «I believe», «I'm happy», «I'm sad», and others; that is, the use of concepts expressing the child's inner state and feelings usually starts from the age of two to two and a half years. All these stages are accompanied by the constant widening of knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical forms.

In the scientific literature, another differentiation of language development stages types can be found: 1. Holophrases (in one-year-olds). The description of this stage basically coincides with the description of the «one word stage». In this typology, it is also important that one word stands for the whole sentence and expresses an intention of the child, which depends on the current situation: a question, a request, a demand [Cameron-Faulkner, Lieven, Tomasello]. 2. Word combinations (around 18 months olds). At this stage, pairs of words (including the base word) are formed, and a kind of speech scheme is created, which contains «immovable» and «moving» elements, the basis for subsequent language constructions; 3. Constructions created around the verb (around 24 months olds). At this stage of language acquisition, children learn to group linguistic elements around the verb. 4. Constructions similar to adult speech (previous position subordinate, then direct addition, then listener) [Szagun : 4–32].

In our opinion, the child's language is structurally organized from the very beginning. It strives for regularity, and hierarchical relationships soon appear in it.

The linguistic structures (phonemic, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic) that the child gradually acquires always correspond to the linguistic structures of the adult.

When observing a child's speech, we should take into account that in some children's speech, the period of using constructions with a base word may be very short and not distinctly manifested. Alongside these constructions, other types of two-word expressions gradually appear. A child's grammatical system is characterized from the very beginning by surface and deep levels. Let's consider a few of the child's expressions for: 1. a cup of coffee; 2. party hat; 3. Nino sock; 3. ball chair; 3. Nino ball.

From the examples, it can be deduced that these sentences convey five different semantic relations of different depths: 1. Connection (cup and coffee); 2. Belonging (Nino's sock); 3. Determining relation (ceremonial hat); 4. Location (the ball is on the chair); 5. Subject-object relation (Nino is playing ball).

In adult speech, we establish semantic relations between sentence members based on syntactic forms. In child speech, we cannot determine semantics between words without taking into account context.

There was a pioneer study conducted in Georgia that raised the awareness of language development disorders. The initiative belonged to Tamar Kalandadze, Professor of Human Development Science, Neurodevelopmental Disorders and Special Education, Doctor of Educational Sciences, Associate Professor of Osford University College. According to this study, language development disorders occur in approximately 10–13% of 4–5-year-old children. Sometimes, they are accompanied by other disorders, and sometimes they exist independently. The occurrence of isolated disorders not associated with any known cause or condition (e.g., autism, Down syndrome) is 7–8%. The research, highlighted the lack of tools for the assessment of language development disorders, the need to raise awareness and knowledge thereof, and conduct research in the Georgian context. The lack of research is the most serious problem because language development is manifested in different ways in different languages, and its markers are not universal [Kalandadze : 15–20].

Preschool children with specific language impairment may encounter the following difficulties:

1. Language comprehension. They need more time to answer, and their answers are too short. They may not answer at all, or one may need to repeat and simplify instructions several times. Often, they rely on visual information to get things right, such as looking and observing others in the process to understand exactly what the instruction means.
2. Use of language. They may not use various words. Also, they may have difficulty connecting words to form a sentence. Their language can often be difficult to understand. They can point with the hand, instead of naming if they want something.
3. Social and learning skills. Although they may be quite sociable, it may be difficult to make friends or play with other children. It is difficult for them to engage in, so they often prefer to play alone because it is easier [Gogilidze, Svanidze, Katamadze, Chachkhiani : 18–29].

How can one help such children? The answer is to give the child an opportunity to make a proposal, express an opinion, and establish communication with other children and adults during the conversation.

In this paper, we have chronologically examined the stages and linguistic aspects of language development in a child under six years of age, as well as numerous problems related to the development of children's language causing the

constant interest of linguists. This is what determines the relevance, purpose, and methodological foundations of our study.

There are three types of processes of a child's language development: 1. The process of audio or visual perception; 2. The process of producing linguistic expressions; 3. The process of language acquisition.

Dividing a child's language development into stages (the pre-speech stage, the one-word stage, the two-word stage, and the telegram-style stage) will reveal speech-related problems. These stages of a child's speech development correspond to the development of phonemic, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects of language.

Theories of child language development present in modern psycholinguistics require a critical approach, revision, and re-evaluation. Child language development is complex, so conclusions cannot be drawn that are based on any single theory.

Observing the dynamics of a child's language development requires knowledge of the child's individual, psychological, and age-related characteristics. A child's environment, society, parents, mental processes, genetic factors, age, gender, and cognitive skills (memory, thinking, perception, etc.) determine a child's language development.

Preschool language development disorders are a global problem that can significantly affect a child's academic development and the quality of life of a future citizen. Therefore, evidence-based practice is necessary for children with language development disorders. Planned studies must be carried out in collaboration with experienced, competent Georgian and foreign neuropsychologists and linguotherapists.

Instruments for studying the language development of preschool children should be different for different languages because language development disorders manifest themselves differently in different languages, and their markers are not universal. Instruments used in one specific language will be of little help in diagnosing Georgian-speaking children, as Georgian is very specific with regard to pronunciation, intonation, specific phonetic system, and lexical structure. The lack of studies based on the specifics of a particular language therefore poses a serious problem.

The generalization of the results of the study will lay the foundation for the emergence of innovative approaches and theories, which is important for the development of modern psycholinguistics, and will help individuals and specialists interested in studying the issue to develop strategies to improve children's language development and apply them in practice.

We believe it is important to study the impact of modern digital technologies on the language development of preschool children.

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**Маріам КОБЕРІДЗЕ**

Горійський державний університет  
вул. Чавчавадзе, 53, Горі, 1400, Грузія  
Електронна пошта : maikoberidze@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6604-1628>

**Тінатін МШВИДОБАДЗЕ**

Горійський державний університет  
вул. Чавчавадзе, 53, Горі, 1400, Грузія  
Електронна пошта: tinikomshvidobadze@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3721-9252>

## **ЕТАПИ ТА ЛІНГВІСТИЧНІ АСПЕКТИ МОВНОГО РОЗВИТКУ ДІТЕЙ ДО ШЕСТИ РОКІВ**

Численні проблеми розвитку дитячої мови та постійний інтерес лінгвістів визначили актуальність, мету та методичні основи наукової роботи авторів статті — дослідити й вивчити психолінгвістичні аспекти та когнітивні основи мовного розвитку дітей дошкільного віку, виявити причини перешкод у мовному розвитку, знайти шляхи розв'язання проблеми з розладом мови та розробити рекомендації щодо покращення результатів. Проблеми, окреслені у статті, досліджувалися з використанням методів описового, історико-порівняльного та критичного аналізу. Зокрема, розглядаються та переосмислюються різні теорії, наукова література, що стосуються сучасних проблем та етапів мовного розвитку дітей до шести років. Ці етапи (передмовленнєва стадія, етап одного слова, етап двох слів, етап проголошення речення) відповідають фонематичному, морфологічному, синтаксичному та прагматичному аспектам. Виявляється, що всі діти, незалежно від їхньої мовної належності, в однаковій послідовності засвоюють мовленнєві звички, фонематичні одиниці, звукові значення. Інструментарій для вивчення мовного розвитку таких дітей має бути відмінним для різних мов, оскільки порушення мовного розвитку проявляються по-різному, і їхні маркери не є універсальними. У зв'язку з цим грузинська система мовлення вирізняється специфічною фонетичною системою і граматику.

Це дослідження сприятиме появі в сучасній психолінгвістиці інноваційних підходів і теорій, пов'язаних з порушеннями мовного розвитку дітей віком до шести років, а також допоможе особам і фахівцям, зацікавленим у вивченні даної проблеми, розробити і застосувати на практиці стратегії поліпшення мовного розвитку дітей віком до шести років

Ключові слова: дитина, мова, мовлення, етапи розвитку, психолінгвістика, проблема.