

# EARLY COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

MELITA KOVAČEVIĆ

<sup>1</sup> Department of Speech and Language Pathology, Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb, Croatia

This introductory paper discusses traditional approaches of early communication and language development. A brief historical overview of the developments has been presented. New technologies, scientific breakthroughs and improvement of standards of living emphasize the importance of an interdisciplinary approach which leads to qualitative changes in research and practice. At the same time, however, those changes require both adaptation to new circumstances and different education of experts. Discussion of various aspects of interdisciplinarity in the field follows introducing the readers to the set of heterogeneous papers with a common denominator - research of early human development with an emphasis on communication and language development.

The areas of early communication and language development were traditionally related to certain professions. Psychologists studied early communication, linguists were involved in language development and speech therapists would step in if the language development was impaired. The approach to these areas was very simplistic, especially in terms of their relevance to this aspect of human development, failing to emphasize their interrelationship with other aspects of development or their impact on the individual's subsequent development. Furthermore, the lack of universal terminology posed certain obstacles and the failure to recognize this fact only made things worse.

Let us first take a look at how these fields are defined in dictionaries, glossaries and encyclopedias. Psihologijski rječnik (Petz, 1992, Dictionary of Psychology) explains the word *communication* only as the process of emitting, transmitting and receiving messages. The same dictionary defines *language* basically as a linguistic category with no mention of language development or how it relates to thinking, and the reader is referred to *psycholinguistics*. The author of

the dictionary explains that psycholinguistics is a term increasingly used as a synonym of the psychology of speech (language). He continues to say that the field of psycholinguistics includes a variety of disciplines, but that it applies methods which are largely those of psychology. By contrast, the encyclopedic dictionary of psychology published in 1979 (edited by Eysneck, Arnold, Meilli) pays much more attention to *language*. It sees it as a linguistic category, but at the same time recognizes its ties with communication and speech emphasizing the variety of approaches to language and including the aspect of language disorders. The authors apply the same approach when defining *communication*, which they view from different perspectives and relate to different areas. As far as *psycholinguistics* is concerned, they emphasize its interdisciplinary concerns and heterogeneity. However, when establishing fields it is based on and what it focuses on, linguistics comes first and psychology only fourth, following communication and information science. Various contemporary textbooks on developmental psychology deal to some extent with the issues of early communication and language