

Pedagogical Conditions of the Development of Grammatically Accurate Speech of 3 to 5 Years Old Children

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Abstract. The usage of language provides implementation of different functions in children's lives. One of them is the communicative function – the speaking role becomes a tool of communication. Speech development is an important task of pre-school pedagogy and its successful implementation ensures the formation of child's communicative competence. The third year of life is an especially important period for a child's speech development, when vocabulary expands rapidly. The child's attention focuses on grammar formations when specific number of words have been learned. Being in a free, active, creative and natural speech environment, a child acquires grammatical structures as certain speech stereotypes from peers and adults. There are different tasks and exercises to promote grammatically correct speech found in pre-school education curriculum program but they are insufficient. While organizing the learning process, the teacher is guided by the educational content of the program, and if these tasks are not exactly revealed, well targeted work is incomplete. The empirical research deals with the monolingual Latvian-speaking children's ability to reconcile the adjectives with nouns in gender, number and case, as well as usage of definite and indefinite endings of adjectives. The aim of the research is to explore pedagogical conditions which could promote 3 – 5 years old children's skills to reconcile adjectives with nouns. Materials and methods: analysis of theoretical and literary sources. Empirical research methods: Qualitative research method – teaching observation, test, data processing. Results, conclusions: 3 – 5 years old children's ability to reconcile the adjectives with nouns in gender, number and case is successful if the teacher offers appropriate topics for promoting the development of the Latvian language; when the teacher promotes the child's the ability to describe objects, actions, to compare them by using productive questions and the child shows an active participation during this cognitive process.

Key words: grammatically accurate speech, pre-school child, pedagogical conditions.

Introduction

Language is essential in everyone's life both for personal development and socialization, so the development of child's speech is the parents and pre-school teachers' task. The results of the research show that the number of children who have speech difficulties in Latvia has increased (Tūbele, 2015). Teachers face the problem that many children have poor vocabulary and they have not developed the skill to build logical, complete sentences and to reconcile different word forms. Therefore, it is important that at the pre-school education stage, special attention is paid to the development of different aspects of the child's language. The third year of life is a particularly important period in the development of the child's speech, when his word stocks rapidly expands. When it is acquired to a certain amount, the child also starts paying attention to grammar formations – at the age of three the child already speaks in sentences, so it is important that he learns to use various grammar forms correctly, reconcile them. While being in free, active, creative and natural environment, the child learns grammar structure as definite speech stereotypes from adults. The role of parents and teachers in the development of the child's language and communication, as well as in other areas of upbringing, is very important. In order to teach the child to talk and interact, he needs a positive example of different communication-oriented tasks which when carried out in the form of a game, develop the necessary linguistic skills. In the curriculum of pre-school education there are tasks that promote development of grammatically correct speech, however, there should be more of such tasks. The curriculum is a guide for teachers, when organizing the learning process, but if these tasks are not accurately revealed, the learning process is defective. When analyzing the training materials, their linguadidactical design was found not qualitative, the selection of language samples could be more considered and systemic. One of the reasons of the problem could be the fact that such a study, which would collect and analyze the data with the aim of finding out what difficulties the child faces when learning the grammar system of the Latvian language, has never been carried out. Based only on one's own experience and intuition, it is difficult for the authors of the learning tools to develop purposeful tasks. Unfortunately, until now in Latvia there is no study on the development of preschoolers' grammatically correct speech.

So one of the directions of the international research project "Latvian language monolingual and bilingual learning: tools, theories and applications" (LAMBA) is an experimental research of monolingual and a bilingual Latvian-speaking children's grammatical and (morpho)phonological language acquisition, during which three experiments were carried out.

In this article, the results of the third experiment of the study will be analysed and the possibilities to use them in pre-school teaching process will be evaluated.

The first four years are the most important stage in the development of human's speech, because then one's first language and the perception of language system in general is created. A pre-school age child learns the word stock, pronunciation and grammar of the native language unconsciously based on imitation. The age of 3 years is considered to be a very important phase of language learning. At this age the sensitive period of language development sets in – the child listens, perceives, imitates and exercises the speech organs. If he is denied this possibility, then the further language development is delayed. Imitation is an unconditional reflex that you do not understand, but it is natural (Druviete, 2010, 126; Freiberga, 2006, 135; Hoff, 2014, 7; Irbe, Lindenberga, 2014, 138; Rūķe–Draviņa, 1992, 9). The glossary of speech therapy terms interprets imitation as arbitrary (intentional) or non- arbitrary (involuntary) movement, actions, demeanor and speech (Lūse, Miltiņa, 2012, 41). The child, when imitating, doing research, learn from his own mistakes in everyday situations, not only in those periods and situations where educational activities are planned (Lieģeniece, 2003, 15).

Pre-school children are amazingly open to new knowledge, they show great interest and enthusiasm in all pursuits in which they need to observe, perform experiments, to research because the desire to explore all the unknown is natural. Preschool age children will remember the information that is associated with the earlier experienced emotions and interest. The child best remembers the things and actions what he needs and what interests him (Выготский, 2005).

Children acquire knowledge of the language naturally, both directly by using the language and indirectly by learning it systematically.

Children's speech develops as the need to communicate; the child's vocabulary gradually expands. The word does not reflect the reality of the subject matter, but vision, also known as the language of the media, which creates one's understanding of this subject. The child starts creating word formations, that are distorted real words, in the third year of life. On the basis of L. Vygotsky's studies, it happens not because it is difficult for the child to pronounce or repeat those words, but because he understands the words like this (Miltiņa, 2005, 37; Zīriņa, Kauliņa, 2008, 162, 165; Выготский, 1997).

At the mid pre-school age the child uses the language not only to comment his work but also for discovering the world and creating his understanding about it. The child's language becomes smooth, expressive. The child intensively learns grammar forms of the language and new concepts which are created due to the feelings created by what he has seen, heard or experienced. The child is able to plan and regulate his speech (Rūķe–Draviņa, 1992, 286; Трошин, Жулина, 2005, 161).

Up to the age of five the child has mastered noun declensions, verb tense forms, knows how to form simple extended sentences, also has started forming complex sentences. Gradually the child acquires skills to reconcile nouns and adjectives in gender, number and case, he starts understanding the endings of the words and actively uses prepositions in his speech. At pre-school age a gradual transition from adult's initiated to child's own initiated narration. As the child's vocabulary expands, the syntactic and morphological structure of his speech matures, the child's narrative becomes increasingly more independent, the child wants to tell something to the surrounding people. The child's speech grammatically is similar to adults' speech. At this age the child has basically mastered grammar (Hoff, 2005; Svence, 1999).

The semantic basis of adjectives is the concept of feature. In one's consciousness or perception system adjectives exist as abstract notions of a feature the specific manifestation of which depends on the situation – in connection with a particular subject, a living creature or natural phenomenon. Thus, adjectives do not have their own denotation. Adjectives get the connection with their denotations only through the nouns that they denote (Nītiņa, 2015, 370). In the Latvian language adjectives have category of certainty/uncertainty. The author can additionally characterize different realia whether the object is known, previously mentioned, or unknown, uncertain judging from the definite or indefinite endings of

the adjectives. This means that this is one of those aspects of language learning, that can cause a problem to pre-school age children because his perception of the world is direct, specific and abstraction, skills of generalization have not developed yet. It also is often observed in the speech of pre-school, sometimes of elementary school and occasionally older monolingual Latvian children, but these mistakes are particularly observed in the speech of Russophonics children and adults.

Methodology

In the development and implementation of the study theoretical and empirical research methods were used. Such a study on children's speech takes place in Latvia for the first time, therefore other countries, especially Norwegian scientists experience, was investigated, the theoretical basis of the study was developed, tests "Acquisition of morphosyntactic indicators: reconciliation of adjective and noun gender" were created, probated and improved.

To carry out the empirical research, 33 picture cards were created to determine the child's ability to reconcile the adjectives with nouns in number, gender and case. The study involved 15 children aged 3 – 5. In the Ministry of education and science description of the contents of compulsory general education from August 19, 2016, it is stated that the competency approach is the appropriate approach for the demand of the 21st century society, which envisages that to a person, who lives in constantly changing circumstances, freedom is provided by one's abilities that are based on competences. Competence is individual's readiness to act in today's changing world, the ability to use knowledge, skills and attitudes in solving problems, in real-life situations, the ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a specific context (educational, work, personal or socially political). The author believes that the implemented pedagogical approach facilitates formation of communicative competence and is closely associated with the cooperation, adults' skills to direct the child's growth tolerantly, to use the unfinished sentence approach, explicitly formulate statements and questions.

In the framework of the project a control research with 10 Latvian speaking adults (6 women, 4 men) was carried out in order to find out what the typical mistakes are.

Results and discussion

The empirical research investigated monolingual Latvian – speaking children's skill to reconcile adjectives and nouns in number, gender and case as well as the usage of definite and indefinite endings of adjectives applying the offered research tools of the monolingual and bilingual Latvian speaking children's grammatical and (morpho) phonological acquisition experimental study (Rodin, Westergaard, 2015). The methodology of the study and the images were created by the project researcher O. Ureka (Urek, 2016).

Using the 33 picture cards the child's ability to reconcile adjectives with nouns in number gender and case, as well as the usage of definite and indefinite endings of adjectives was stated. Through investigating the formation of grammatically accurate speech of 3 – 5-year-old children, also sound pronunciation was observed, although the picture cards were not especially selected for this purpose, as well as children's knowledge about the realia and their colors seen in the picture.

The children were invited to look at the picture, to name what they see in it. Detailed questions were asked to the child, for example: It is a carrot. This one, too. Compare the carrots' colors. Look carefully! What disappeared?

Analyzing the conclusions of pedagogy, psychology, philosophy and linguistics about the development of children's grammatically accurate speech, criteria and indicators for evaluation of grammatically accurate speech were developed (Table 1).

In the research child's skill to reconcile nouns and adjectives in number, gender and case was investigated, as well as his skill to use the ending of the adjectives correctly. 15 children aged 3,2 – 4,11 took part in the research (9 boys and 6 girls).

Table 1

Criteria and indicators for evaluation of grammatically accurate speech

Criteria	Indicators	Level of grammatically accurate speech
The skill to use grammatically correct language	1. The skill to reconcile nouns and adjectives in number, gender and case grammatically accurately	Low – the child does not reconcile the nouns and adjectives in number, gender and case or does it rarely.
		Sufficient – the child reconciles the nouns and adjectives only in number and gender.
		High – the child independently reconciles the nouns and adjectives in number, gender and case
	2. The skill to use the definite and indefinite endings of adjectives correctly.	Low – the usage of definite/indefinite endings is chaotic or the child rarely uses correct endings.
		Sufficient – the child uses the definite/indefinite endings correctly, but sometimes makes mistakes.
		High – the child independently uses the definite/indefinite endings correctly.

In order to analyze the got results purposefully, all the indicators were evaluated in points:

- 1 point – low indicator in children’s speech was observed rarely (pictures 0 – 6),
- 2 points – sufficient indicator was observed in children’s speech often (picture 7 – 14),
- 3 points – high indicator was observed in children’s speech almost always or always (pictures 15 -22).

In both cases the results were obtained in a direct observation, the adjectives and nouns mentioned by the children were registered in the observation worksheet, as well as recorded. All the results were control checked. In order to state the child’s level of grammatically accurate speech the results were evaluated and analyzed (Figure 1).

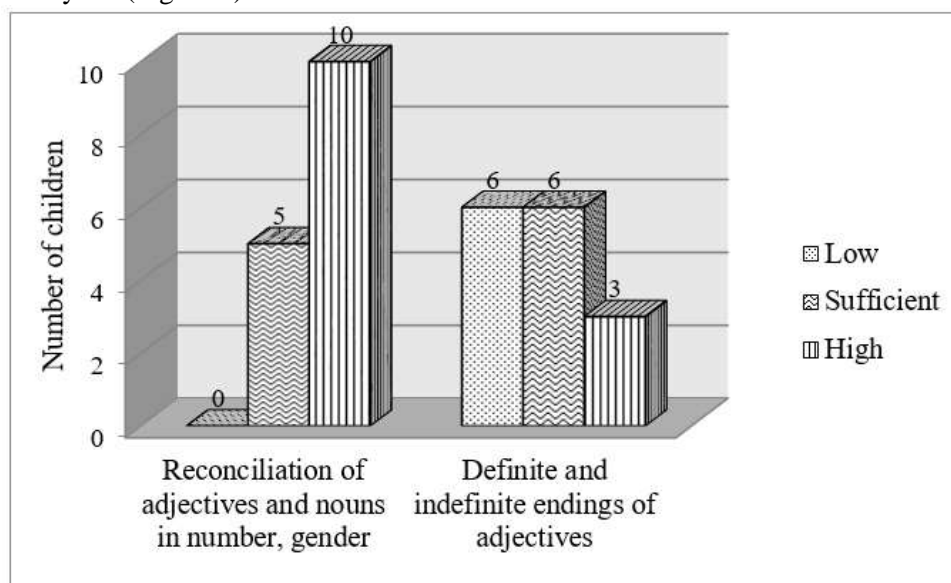


Figure 1. 3 – 5 years old children’s skill to form grammatically accurate utterances.

As shown in Figure 1, top rated skill is, reconciliation of adjectives and nouns in number, gender and case. None of the children showed low level results, 5 children showed sufficient level level results, 10 children showed high level results. As it was predicted, quite often children use the definite and indefinite endings of adjectives incorrectly: 6 children have low level, 6 children –medium level, only 3 children used them at high level.

Analyzing children's utterances the following shortcomings were found:

- children mix colors or replace them by another color familiar to them, such as: green steering wheel: blue steering wheel, brown carrot: dark gray carrot, white plate: the transparent plate;

- the reconciliation of such nouns as ear, eye, the castle with the adjectives causes difficulties to children, for example, a red ear, the brown ears, the blue ears, a red eye, the green eyes, a green castle. It shows that children seek for a system in grammar and replace the less frequently applied feminine nouns of the 6th declension with the better known 1st declension nouns.

The obtained research results show one more tendency typical for that age children – as in every day life, also in the language children strive for clarity because the usage of definite endings prevail over the indefinite endings in their speech. Only in some cases the indefinite ending was used correctly.

Interesting results were obtained in a study of adults' speech, where 10 adults (6 women and 4 men) whose native language is the Latvian language took part (Table 2). The Latvian language is also used in everyday communication. Adults were offered the same picture cards and had to perform the same task as the children.

Table 2

Participants' age and education

Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female
37;10	33;0	34;8	45;7	24;10	18;9	24;2	45;3	56;3	22;7
Second.	Second.	Second.	Second.	Second.	Primary	Second.	Higher	Higher	Second.

It was found out that only 2 females (33; 0); (22, 7) and one male (45;7), used the definite and indefinite ending correctly. The oldest male (56; 3) demonstrated the largest number of inaccuracies, out of 31 samples he made 30 mistakes of using definite/indefinite endings of adjectives. Other members showed some deviations from the norm in their speech. Adults' comments about the situations shown in picture 31 were analysed (Figure 2).

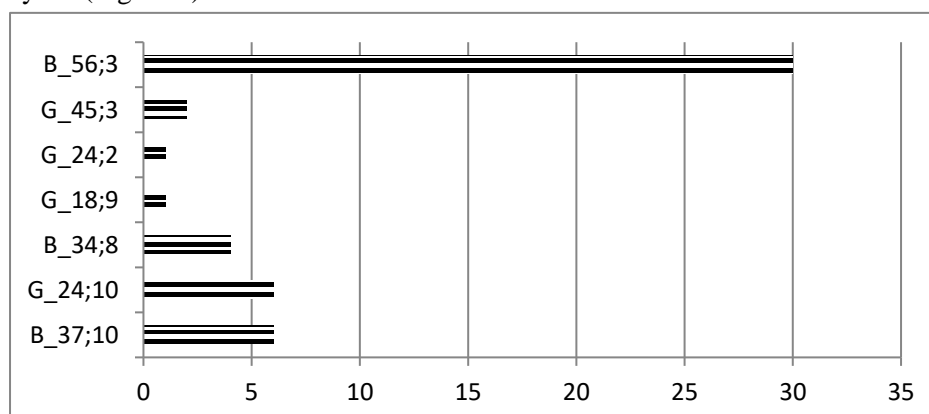


Figure 2. Inadequate usage of definite/indefinite endings of adjectives in adults' speech.

As it is showed in the table above, adults also make mistakes in their speech when they have to apply the correct definite/indefinite endings of adjectives. Of course, the number of respondents is too small to make far-reaching conclusions. In order to obtain scientifically reliable data, a study should be carried out with a much wider set of respondents covering different age, education, social status and other groups. Possibly, both the children and adults were baffled by the need to use a little bit artificial, contextually related language constructions, as grammatical markers could not appear in the hint phrases. At the same time, the results of the study are symptomatic and worth parents and preschool teachers' attention. Obviously parents and teachers' role in the development of children's communicative competence, as well as in other spheres of upbringing, is essential. J. Rodina and M. Vestergard in their study on how grammatical categories are used by bilingual (Norwegian and Russian) children, concluded that the major impact of the use of the category is made by the external factors – family and the environment in which the child resides, as well as prediction of the gender of nouns as an effective means of acquiring nouns' grammatical category (Rodina, Westergard, 2015). In order to make the child talk and interact, he needs a positive example.

Language system is formed and evolves in blocks. In each development stage of the child's speech there is a block in which the phonetic, lexical, grammatical units combine in a single entity. The closed systems of the block consist of phonetics and grammar, but the open subsystem consists of vocabulary which is constantly changing and developing (Miltiņa, 2005, 42). When acquiring a language, a number of components are learned: phonetical (sounds, groups of sounds), lexical (vocabulary), grammatical or

morphological (structures and models of the grammar system), pragmatic (ability to listen, to hear each other in a socially acceptable manner) (Hoff, 2005, 32).

As adjective are actively used in various language genres and styles, the development of grammatically correct speech should be paid attention to already at pre-school age. In pre-school education curriculum there are tasks for that, but they are not enough. Teachers when organizing the learning process, follow the curriculum but if the tasks are not accurately targeted the learning process is defective because one of the conditions of successful language learning is purposefully planned environment in which a child tries to consciously create the attitude to himself and the world, gains an idea of the surrounding world and forms his value system. Natural environment of speech is the environment where language acquisition happens spontaneously, while artificial speech is purposely organized. Natural environment of speech may be beneficial or interfere with the development of the child's speech and also the general mental development. It will be beneficial when adults speak with children in a clear language, promote the development of children's speech, answer their questions. So teacher's natural speech when communicating with children on daily basis is very important. Children have the opportunity to hear the narration, where different adjectives are heard, track it, listen how different sentences sound. Children usually perceive them unconsciously, and then just as consciously imitate in their speech. At the same time with empathy, imagining the heard narration the children gain new linguistic experience and learn to express their feelings. If you then create a dialogue with children or play a game where they have to use adjectives with definite/indefinite endings, the children remember not only the form but also the usage of the adjective. By stimulating the need to use models both in familiar and new situations, the desired result is achieved. Communicative skills allow the child to participate in all forms of communication when he uses his speech in action. With engaging in different communication situations, the child gradually gets involved in speech environment and learns to use the means of language according to the specific speech situation and acquires experience in making a dialogue (Казаковская, 2006).

Questions are very important in adult and children's communication. The questions that adults ask contribute to the child's communicative competence- acquisition of language systems, vocabulary development and communicative skills. The adult, when talking to the child, creates a dialogue, thus encouraging the child to speak. The child, when creating sentences, uses a wide range of grammatical forms, but wisely asked questions help children learn the concepts (Fisher, 2005; Irbe, Lindenberga, 2014, 138; Freiberga, Dzintere, 2009, 212; Казаковская, 2006). Teachers' questions preferably should be designed to encourage intellectual activity, encourage kids to think. The questions that already contain the answer do not promote thinking. Adults' questions should cause the child's desire to communicate. Productive questions should be asked more actively as generally the expected answers to closed questions are "Yes" or "no", they reflect the people's choice, but do not contribute to rendering the reflection of expanded thought in speech (Fisher, 2005; Tauriņa, 2015). Productive and stimulating questions promote the child to think or do, they activate the partner, express interest, suggest the interlocutor to ponder on responses, the child feels more relaxed, because he himself can choose which facts, ideas, information, provide the adult with (Fisher, 2005).

Not enough attention is paid to the role of the family in acquisition of mother tongue, because the basis of the language is created at an earlier age, prior school age. Children's ability to perceive the language material is immense, so parents are advised to speak with children in the richest possible language (Druvieta, 2010, 204; Rodina, Westergaard, 2015).

Almost since the birth the child begins to develop contacts with the surrounding people. Common activities and social games with peers are more active at preschool age when true exchange of thought and joint action take place. This interaction causes the children also count with opposing views and encourages them to adopt new ideas and learn new behavior (Lyle, Russo, 1998).

Analyzing the theoretical conclusions about the pedagogical conditions of 3 – 5 years old children's grammatically accurate speechformation, a pedagogical implementation model was developed for promoting the acquisition of the Latvian language to pre-school age children (Figure 3).

The teacher respecting the child's experience, needs and interests, improves the environment, which brings forth new impressions, invites children to express themselves through productive questions. The teacher is aware of the motives that are created by the activity of the child and are personally significant experiences.

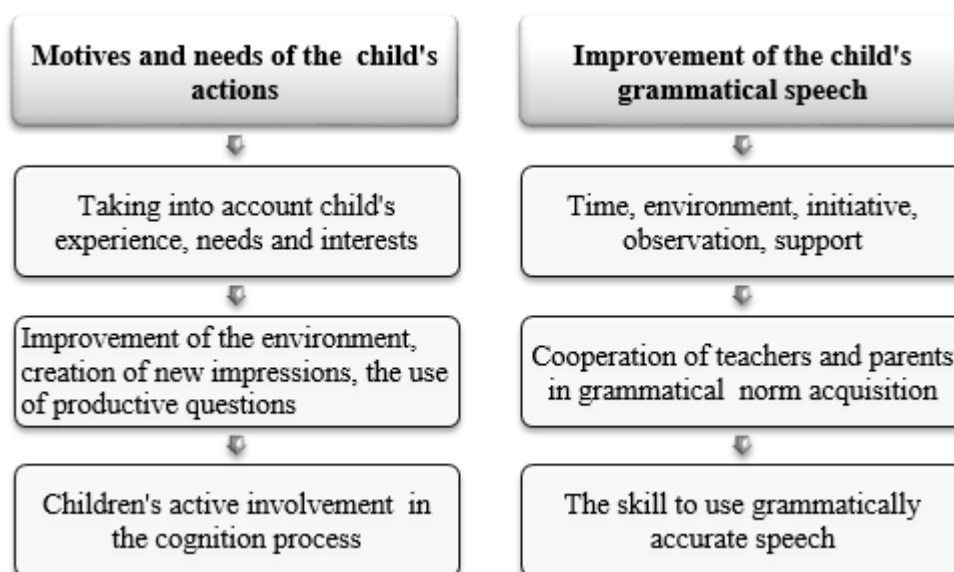


Figure 3. Promotion of the acquisition of the Latvian language to pre-school age children: pedagogical implementation model.

Consciously planned environment is the main proposal for the speech. The surrounding environment, the environment of the speech and social environment are important in the acquisition of the language. The surrounding environment includes the objects and creatures the child sees around and serves as an inner and outer stimulus for developing child's speech. The environment of speech includes the quality of speech, the quality of communication process, the relationship between the partners who participate in the talk, the content of the talk and its correspondence to the child's experience. Social environment represents such relationship between the learners and teachers that promote positive emotional interaction and cooperation (Anspoka, 2013, 16).

To encourage the child to speak, unfinished sentences, concisely expressed questions and accurate speech are used. Adults encourage children to participate in the game "Tell, compare your and your neighbor's clothes!", "What color are the toys?", "Let's start boasting!" The teacher asks children to involve in games, practical, everyday situations, to participate in independent process of recognizing objects actively. The teacher respects and supports the child's choice. The cooperation of teachers and parents happen on cognition level, allowing to implement the tasks promoting acquisition of grammar norms.

Conclusions

One of the conditions for successful language learning is the teachers and parents' speech sample, culture of speech, as well as active, free, targeted environment that enables children to explore, watch and see patterns, to build understanding of the value of mutual relations and events. 3 – 5 years old children's skills to reconcile adjectives with nouns in number, gender and case is successful, if the teacher offers appropriate themes for developing the Latvian language, using productive questions, accurately describing the objects, actions, comparing them, causing the child to engage actively in the cognition process.

The usage of definite/indefinite endings of adjectives causes difficulty to children. Only 20 % of the children involved in the research use the adjective endings correctly therefore when designing the curriculum, particular attention should be paid to the necessity to purposely create natural linguistic environment, to explore the category of certainty and uncertainty, to use the appropriate means of expression.

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