

Mealtime Talk in Contemporary Childhood of Croatian Language Speakers

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Abstract

Exposure to mealtime talk in daily life is stimulating to the overall speech development of a child. However, nowadays children are less and less exposed to the experience of eating together with their significant adults. A study was conducted within this context to check the frequency of families eating together and mealtime talk in contemporary childhood of Croatian language speakers. Research participants were parents of children at an early and preschool age. The frequency of eating together, paying attention to media during mealtimes as well as the topics of mealtime conversations were evaluated. The purpose of the study was to determine the possible relation of the mentioned elements to the family structure and parents' employment status and education level. The results indicate a more frequent habit of eating together in families where a grandfather and/or a grandmother is present, in families where one of the parents is unemployed and in families where parents are high school graduates. Parents mostly reported that during family mealtimes they were focused on communication rather than the media, and that they mostly discuss daily events.

Key words: family mealtime; children's language development; mealtime conversation.

Introduction

A child's mastering of linguistic communication is intrinsically related to their overall development and is complex and dynamic as well as determined by numerous biological and environmental factors, primarily by a multitude of language experiences gained while living with other people. Environment can be a space of stimulating interpersonal relationships and material conditions that help the child's development in general, in addition to language development, but can also be a space of limitation,

negativity, dissatisfaction and anxiety, making it more difficult for the child to grow up. The motivating human and material environment in the child's early age means success in tasks they will face in school and life in the future.

In this sense, the child's early interactions with other family members are crucial, especially with their primary guardians, i.e. mother and father, and conversation is of great importance during these interactions. Precisely the living word, face-to-face communication and conversation (listening and speaking) make up primary interaction of the child with their parents and other family members. As emphasised by Catherine Snow (1993), face-to-face linguistic communication is the most important contribution of a parent to a child's language development, more important than reading storybooks, telling stories or watching plays. Mealtime conversations between parents and children in diverse situations such as expressing needs, feelings, thoughts, ensuring discipline, meeting others and socialising in general give the child the opportunity to express their thoughts, choose words, structure utterances, respect the norms of communication and learn new words, which all develops child language skills. The conversation between parents and children and the amount of time they spend in conversation is positively related to children's knowledge and language achievements that affect greater learning capacity and efficiency, both in school and from life experiences. When talking with adults, the child expands their general knowledge and mental vocabulary, and it is these two – the knowledge of the world and the scope of vocabulary – that affect success in school learning (Cameron, 2001) the most. Both are acquired during everyday situations of living with others, one of which is also the family mealtime.

Family mealtime and the child's welfare

The experience of family mealtimes is an important part of human physical, social and cultural life, and numerous benefits for the individual and the individual's physical, cognitive, language, emotional and social development are related to it. Family mealtimes contribute not only to children's physical health but also to their school achievements and language development, and help reduce the occurrence of various negative behaviours.

It has been demonstrated (Fiese & Schwartz, 2008) that adolescents who eat with their family five or more times a week consume alcohol, smoke cigarettes or otherwise behave inappropriately much less. These effects of family meals are more evident in younger (12 – 13 years old) than older adolescents. On the other hand, fewer family meals a week is related to a higher frequency of risky behaviours in children, especially girls (Kevin et al., 2012), regardless of the structure of the family they are growing up in. It has been found that children who live with both parents, but rarely dine together, are more prone to risky behaviour than those who live in differently structured families, such as single-parent or foster families, who eat together every day.

Family mealtime is also related to the child's overall health, especially dietary habits. Frequent family meals reduce the chance of developing an eating disorder in early adolescence, of bulimia in female students, and of obesity (Berge et al., 2015).

Ultimately, family meals contribute to family cohesion, i.e. the bonding of family members (Fiese et al., 2006). This all indicates the important role family mealtime can have on forming the behaviour of children and young adults.

By eating with family members at the table, the child has a chance to listen to the speech of adult speakers, hear new words, follow the narrative flow, think on what it hears and learn the communication norms – the conversational etiquette. When it comes to thematic preoccupations of family mealtime talk, talking about the meal and the activity of eating is inevitable (e.g. *Pass me the salt, please* or *Why do you separate the peas from the rice?*), but the talks also expand to other topics, for example, the events that occurred that day, memories, stories about life and life experiences or associations triggered by something from the environment. From recorded situations of family mealtimes (Beals, 2001), it has been found that conversations are held about the most diverse content: various people, places, things and phenomena, present and absent, from a wide range of topics. Nevertheless, it could be said that certain topics or preoccupations occur more frequently during conversations, such as the topic of food (the one on the table and food in general), the topic of events that occurred that day in kindergarten/school and the topic of plans for the rest of the day and for the following day.

It has been found (Snow et al., 1995) that the participation of four-year-olds and five-year-olds in conversation during family mealtimes is positively related to their later school achievements in literacy and language. More accurately, children who were more exposed to conversation during family mealtimes had shown better results during vocabulary evaluations, when defining words and understanding text. Therefore, Beals (2001, p. 91) advises parents to talk with their children every day in order to: advance their language skills, let the children direct the conversation themselves and decide on the conversation topics, answer the children's questions without fear of not being competent in all topics and subjects that interest them, explain the purpose or motivations of the speaker and discuss it with the child, use less frequent and technical words as they are children are thus exposed to new words, explain new words with synonyms, encourage the children's narration of daily events, encourage children to speak of their experiences, talk to children about plans and wishes for the time that is yet to arrive.

Family meals are stimulating for the language development of children in general, and especially for the development of narrative capabilities (Beals, 2001; Beals & Snow, 1994; Snow & Beals, 2006) and the enrichment of vocabulary (Beals, 1997; 2001; Beals & Tabors, 1995; Tabors et al., 2001). In fact, by listening to others narrate and speak of their own experiences or plans for the rest of the day and the following day, in addition to explaining the plans to others, the child notices the key elements of a story, progression of events, cause-effect relationships between events and learns how to segment events into smaller episodes – sequences – and organise these sequences into a clear image. Encouraged by adult speakers, the child takes part in conversation and becomes a co-narrator and, in turn, an independent narrator of

an event. Furthermore, mealtime talk is one of the communication situations when children encounter new words and establish corresponding semantic connections between what they hear and already know, that is, between new words and those that already exist in their mental vocabulary.

For the child to experience all the described benefits of family meals, it is important they have the opportunity to sit at the table with adults and participate in eating and in conversation as often as possible.

Habits of family mealtimes in contemporary childhood

Today's society of the Western cultural circle is characterised by diverse families (considering their structure, economic status and the social and cultural living environment), therefore, family mealtime habits are also diverse. Even though very differently expressed, dependent on the culture and the family, the tendency to reduce the quantity of family mealtimes is noticeable. Today, just one meal is eaten together in families, after the return of parents from work and children from school/ kindergarten, and the family meal lasts for about twenty minutes (Beals, 2011; Fiese & Schwartz, 2008). Even though this is not the same in all cultures, in the Western society it has become more frequent to eat a family meal outside the home (house/ apartment), usually in a restaurant but also in a car, while driving. Even though today it is correct that daily family gathering at the table in the Western world is significantly less represented than before, the fact remains that no other activity gathers the family members together as often as a family meal.

When it comes to the frequency of family mealtime, it differs from region to region and family to family. Significant differences are due to the employment or unemployment of parents and the nature of their work, rhythm of urban or rural life, family structure and alike. Fiese and Schwartz (2008) have prepared an overview of studies that shows, according to surveys of adolescents, that (in the US society) about 60 % have a family meal five times a week on average. The same authors (page 4) also specify that the family mealtime frequency depends on the age of children and that family meals are up to four times more frequent in families with small children than in families with adolescents. Considering the relation of family structure to the frequency of family mealtimes, studies have shown that two-parent families eat meals together more often than single-parent families (Levin et al., 2012). A study of the family mealtime frequency and the employment status of parents (Fulkerson et al., 2006; Bianchi, 2011) has shown that meals are more often eaten together in families where the mother is unemployed. In fact, to eat together, time must be spent to prepare and buy ingredients, and not only to consume the meal.

As for how and in which circumstances family meals are taken, electronic media is more and more often included in the family ritual. In a qualitative study conducted in Croatia (Bilić, 2020), parents have confirmed that media often disturbs their family communication at the table. The author also relates the conclusions of a study carried out by Radesky and associates (2014 acc. to Bilić, 2020) that observed the behaviour

of parents or guardians of children up to 10 years old in restaurants during a meal. They have found that, of the 55 observed families, in as many as 40 families the parents or guardians used a mobile phone while eating together with children, some just occasionally and others more often. Fiese and Schwartz (2008) point out that watching television and consuming media during mealtimes has numerous adverse effects on health (focusing on media during mealtime makes recognising signs of satiety more difficult), social and emotional life of family members (who by consuming media content miss the chance to participate in the life of their close family members), and the language development of children.

Taking into account all that was said on the benefits of family mealtime talk for the overall child development, and especially language development, a study was conducted to gain insight into mealtime habits of families with small children in the Republic of Croatia.

Research methods

The study was conducted with a survey questionnaire intended for parents of children of early and preschool age. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was conducted online from January to June 2020. There were 289 participants (83 % were women and 17 % men). Most of the subjects had a family structure of a child/children and two parents (86.3 %), followed by subjects with a family structure of a child/children, parents and other family members (18.2 %), and the least number of subjects had a family structure of a child/children and a single parent (5.5 %). According to the employment status, 94.5 % of the subjects were employed, while 5.5 % were unemployed. Of all the subjects, 20.1 % were high school graduates, while 79.9 % have completed higher education.

The aim of the study was to evaluate family mealtime habits and determine the possible relation between the frequency of family mealtimes and family structures and parents' employment status and education level. Furthermore, the aim was to determine the presence of media content during family mealtimes and the thematic characteristics of communication at the table.

Accordingly, five research hypotheses were set:

H1 – family mealtime is more frequent in expanded families (children, parents, grandmother/grandfather)

H2 – family mealtime is more frequent in families where one of the parents is not employed

H3 – family mealtime is more frequent in families where a parent has a lower level of education

H4 – during family mealtimes, families are significantly more focused on the TV program or digital media content than on mutual communication

H5 – families are very different in regard to the topics that are most often discussed during family mealtimes.

Results

When speaking of family mealtime frequency, most of the participants have said that they eat one meal a day together with their child/children (47.8 %), a smaller number of participants have family mealtime several times a day (34.9 %), while the least number of participants eat together with their children several times a week, but not every day (17.3 %).

The Mann-Whitney U test (Table 1) has shown no statistically significant difference in the number of family mealtimes between families consisting of a child/children and a single parent and the family structure of a child/children and two parents ($U = 1935, p > 0.05$). No statistically significant difference was found in the number of family mealtimes between families with a child/children and a single parent and those of a child/children, parents, grandmothers/grandfathers and other family members ($U = 449, p > 0.05$). However, the test has shown a statistically significant difference in the number of family meals ($U = 4300, p < 0.05$) between the two family structures in favour of families of a child/children, parents and grandmothers/grandfathers (median value amounts to 160.81), i.e. they eat together more frequently than members of the family with a child/children and parents (median value amounts to 128.82).

Table 1
Number of family meals in relation to family structure

Variable	Family structure	Median value	U
Number of family meals eaten together	child + 1 parent	130.75	1935
	child + 2 parents	117.92	
Number of family meals eaten together	child + 1 parent	32.95	449
	child + parents + other family members	37.87	
Number of family meals eaten together	child + 2 parents	128.82	4300.00*
	child + parents + other family members	160.81	

* $p < .05$

Furthermore, the largest number of participants stated they very rarely eat with their child/children outside the home (63.7 %), and 32.2 % said they do it once a week, while the smallest number of participants declared they eat outside their home two to three times a week (4.2 %). This can be seen in the Table 2.

Table 2
Number of meals eaten together at home and outside

Variables	Variable level	%	KS
Number of meals eaten together at home	once a day	47.8	4.245*
	several times a day	34.9	
	several times a week	17.3	
Number of meals eaten together outside the home	rarely	63.7	6.763*
	once a week	32.2	
	two to three times a week	4.2	

* $p < .05$

When checking the second hypothesis (H2), the Chi-square test (Table 3) has shown a statistically significant difference in favour of unemployed parents ($\chi^2 = 20.484$, $p < 0.05$), that is, they eat with their children more frequently than parents who are employed. The percentage of unemployed parents who eat several times a day with their family is 87.5 % and 12.5 % of those who eat only one meal together. Furthermore, 18.2 % of employed parents eat with their children several times a week, 32.1 % several times a day and 49.6 % once a day.

Table 3
Number of meals eaten together in relation to the parents' employment status

Number of meals eaten together	Employed		χ^2
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
once a day	49.6	12.5	20, 484*
several times a day	32.1	87.5	
several times a week	18.2	0	

* $p < 0,05$

Furthermore, when checking the third hypothesis (H3), a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 19.239$, $p < 0.05$) in the number of meals eaten together in relation to the level of education has been found. Table 4 shows that participants with higher education most often eat one meal a day with their family, while high school graduates eat a meal together several times a day (29.4 %).

Table 4
Number of meals eaten together in relation to the level of education

Level of education	Once a day (%)	Several times a day (%)	Several times a week (%)	χ^2
High school	11.6	29.4	26.5	19, 239*
University	88.4	70.6	73.5	

To test the fourth hypothesis (H4), that during mealtimes a family is significantly more oriented on the television program or digital media content than on mutual communication, a t-test was conducted, whereby it was found that participants are significantly more ($p < 0.01$) oriented on mutual communication ($M = 2,63$, $SD = 0,40$) than on digital media ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.77$), as shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Family's attention when eating together

Attention when eating together	M	SD	t
on digital media	2,63	0,4	9,68*
on mutual communication	2,11	0,77	

* $p < 0,05$

When eating together, subjects who were more oriented on mutual communication had mostly discussed daily events (59.5 %), talked about the digital comment in

the background in a smaller percentage (30.2 %), and spoke of past events in the smallest percentage (10.3 %).

Discussion

The study has shown that most Croatian families eat a meal together once a day (47.8 %) or several times a day (34.9 %), that is, family mealtime frequency is slightly higher than expected, given the data from the literature (Beals, 2001; Fiese & Schwartz, 2008).

A statistically significant difference has been found in the number of meals eaten together between families of different structures. Extended families (child/children, parent/parents, grandmother/grandfather) statistically significantly eat a meal together more often. This confirmed the first research hypothesis. According to the data obtained in this study, extended family is significantly present in contemporary Croatian society, even though it does not comprise the majority. The results show that in such families meals are eaten together more often than in families with a child/children and two parents. It seems that the members of the older generation are the ones who nurture in today's families the tradition of joint mealtimes. On the other hand, in contrast to other studies (Levin et al., 2012), this study has found no statistically significant difference in the number of meals eaten together between two-parent and single-parent families. A possible explanation for this result could be that the survey questionnaires were completed during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when most people worked from home; therefore, families ate more meals together.

The results of the study have not confirmed the contemporary family's tendency of eating together outside the home. In comparison to the depicted situation in literature (Fiese & Schwartz, 2009), the results of this study have shown that most families (63.7 %) very rarely eat together outside the home. This result can also possibly be attributed to the survey questionnaires having been completed during the critical period of the current pandemic, when eating outside was not as available.

This study has confirmed the supposition that families where one of the parents (most often the mother) is unemployed eat together more frequently. Unemployed subjects most frequently replied that their family eats together several times a day, while employed subjects stated they do it only once a day. Thus, the study confirmed the findings of other studies (Fulkerson et al., 2006; Bianchi, 2011; Hearst et al., 2012) which show that families where the mother is unemployed eat together most often.

This study has confirmed the third research hypothesis by finding that families with parents of higher education most often eat together once a day, while families where parents are high school graduates eat together several times a day. It is probable that subjects with higher education have work that takes more of their time and are significantly more career-oriented, and thus less dedicated to family rituals.

In view of the evidenced changes in contemporary parenthood related to excessive introduction of digital media in education and life with children and family mealtimes (Fiese & Schwartz, 2008; Bilić, 2020), a supposition has been made that more attention is given during family mealtimes to digital media content than mutual communication.

However, the results of this study did not confirm it; moreover, 80 % of the subjects have stated that during mealtimes they are concentrated on conversation, not the media. Thus, the fourth research hypothesis was not confirmed.

The most common topic of conversation were daily events in the family. Thus, the fifth hypothesis was not confirmed because more than half of the respondents singled out everyday events as the most common topic of conversation. Such sharing of personal daily events between family members, as shown in the theoretical part of this paper, can serve as encouragement for children to learn new vocabulary and actively participate in conversation. However, given the research methodology, the subjects' tendency to give socially desirable answers must be taken into account.

Conclusion

The presented study of family mealtime habits in Croatian families mostly confirmed the characteristics of family mealtimes described in literature even though its scope was limited due to the current pandemic, which had also significantly changed family habits. It has also pointed out the somewhat more pronounced habit of eating a meal together several times a day, especially in families where, besides children and parents, a grandmother and/or a grandfather is present. Contrary to expectations, it was found that Croatian families do not pay much attention to media during mealtimes. All this speaks of a thriving habit of eating family meals together and nurturing mutual conversation. Today family meals are often the only place and time when the entire family gathers and has the opportunity to communicate. This is the reason family mealtimes are so stimulating to the overall child development, particularly speech development, vocabulary enrichment and advancement of conversation and narration skills.

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Govor uz blagovanje u suvremenom djetinjstvu govornika hrvatskoga jezika

Sažetak

Razgovor za stolom u vrijeme jela poticajan je za ukupan djetetov jezični razvoj. No u suvremenom su djetinjstvu djeca sve manje izložena iskustvu zajedničkoga blagovanja s odraslim ukućanima. U tom je kontekstu provedeno istraživanje kojemu je bila svrha provjeriti navike zajedničkoga blagovanja i govora uz blagovanje u suvremenom djetinjstvu govornika hrvatskoga jezika. Ispitanici su bili roditelji djece rane i predškolske dobi. Ispitala se učestalost navike zajedničkoga blagovanja, davanje pozornosti medijima tijekom zajedničkoga jela te tematska obilježja (raz) govora uz jelo. Cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi moguću povezanost navedenih elemenata sa strukturom obitelji, zaposlenošću roditelja i njihovom naobrazbom. Rezultati istraživanja govore o učestalijoj navici zajedničkoga blagovanja u obiteljima u kojima su djed i/ili baka, u obiteljima u kojima je jedan od roditelja nezaposlen i u obiteljima gdje je roditelj srednje stručne spreme. Roditelji su većinom izvijestili da su tijekom zajedničkoga jela usmjereni na komunikaciju (a ne na medije) te da najviše razgovaraju o svakodnevnim događajima.

Ključne riječi: dječji jezični razvoj; obiteljski zajednički obroci; razgovor uz jelo.

Uvod

Dječje ovladavanje jezičnom komunikacijom neraskidivo je povezano s ukupnošću dječjega razvoja, složeno je i dinamično te je određeno brojnim biološkim i okolinskim čimbenicima, prije svega mnogobrojnim jezičnim iskustvima koja se stječu u suživotu s drugim ljudima. Okolina može biti prostor poticajnih međuljudskih odnosa i materijalnih uvjeta, što će djetetovu napredovanju uopće, pa i u jezičnom razvoju, davati vjetar u leđa, no može biti i prostor ograničenja, negativnosti, nezadovoljstva i tjeskobe, što će djetetu otežati odrastanje. Poticajno ljudsko i materijalno okruženje u ranoj dobi za dijete znači uspjeh i u daljnjim zadacima koje će preda nj stavljati odgoj, naobrazba, život.

U tom smislu presudne su djetetove rane interakcije s drugim članovima obitelji, posebno s primarnim skrbnicima – majkom i ocem, a u tim interakcijama razgovor je od velike važnosti. Upravo je živa riječ, neposredna komunikacija, razgovaranje

(slušanje i govorenje) primarna interakcija djeteta s roditeljima i ostalim članovima obitelji. Neposredna jezična komunikacija je, kako naglašava Catherine Snow (1993), najvažniji prinos roditelja dječjem jezičnom razvoju, važniji od čitanja slikovnica, pričanja priča, gledanja predstava. Razgovor roditelja i djece u raznim situacijama – u iskazivanju potreba, osjećaja, misli, u osiguravanju reda, u upoznavanju s drugima i socijalizaciji uopće, u razgovoru tijekom zajedničkoga jela – donosi djeci priliku iskazivanja misli, odabira riječi, strukturiranja iskaza, poštovanja uzusa komunikacije, usvajanja novih riječi, a sve to razvija njihove jezične sposobnosti. Razgovor roditelja s djecom i količina vremena koje provode u razgovoru pozitivno su povezani sa spoznajnim i jezičnim postignućima djece, a ta su pak postignuća pozitivno povezana sa sposobnošću i učinkovitošću učenja, ne samo školskoga već i životnoga. Razgovorom s odraslima dijete proširuje svoje opće znanje i svoj mentalni leksikon, a upravo to dvoje – znanje o svijetu i širina vokabulara – najviše utječe na uspjeh u školskom učenju (Cameron, 2001). Jedno i drugo usvaja se u svakodnevnim situacijama suživota s drugima, a jedna je od takvih i zajedničko obiteljsko blagovanje.

Zajedničko obiteljsko blagovanje i djetetova dobrobit

Iskustvo zajedničkoga obiteljskog blagovanja duboko je uraslo u fizički, društveni i kulturni život ljudi, a uza nj su povezane brojne dobrobiti za pojedinca i za njegov tjelesni, kognitivni, jezični, emocionalni i socijalni razvoj. Zajednički obiteljski obroci pridonose fizičkom zdravlju djece, ali i postignućima u školi te jezičnom razvoju, kao i smanjenju rizika od mnogih negativnih oblika ponašanja.

Pokazalo se (Fiese i Schwartz, 2008) da oni adolescenti koji sa svojim obiteljima blagaju pet ili više puta tjedno, rjeđe konzumiraju cigarete i alkohol te rjeđe sudjeluju u neprimjerenim oblicima ponašanja. Ti su učinci zajedničkih obiteljskih obroka jači za mlađe adolescente (12 – 13 godina) negoli za starije. S druge pak strane, manje obiteljskih obroka tjedno povezuje se s većom učestalošću rizičnoga ponašanja djece, posebno djevojčica (Levin, Kirby i Currie, 2012), bez obzira na strukturu obitelji u kojoj odrastaju. Pokazalo se da su mladi koji žive s oba roditelja, a rijetko imaju obiteljski obrok, u većoj opasnosti za razvijanje rizičnoga ponašanja od onih koji žive u drukčijim obiteljskim strukturama (jednoroditeljskim, udomiteljskim i drugim obiteljima), ali svakodnevno jedu sa svojim ukućanima.

Zajedničko obiteljsko blagovanje povezano je i s dobrobiti za djetetovo zdravlje u cjelini, a posebno u području prehrambenih navika. Učestali zajednički obroci smanjuju izgled za razvoj poremećaja prehrane u ranoj adolescenciji, za razvoj bulimije kod studentica te za razvoj pretilosti (Berge i sur., 2015). Zajedničko obiteljsko blagovanje, u konačnici, pridonosi i povezanosti među članovima obitelji (obiteljskoj koheziji) (Fiese, Foley i Spagnola, 2006). Sve to govori o važnoj ulozi koju zajedničko obiteljsko blagovanje može imati u formiranju ponašanja djece i mladih.

Jedući s članovima obitelji za stolom, dijete ima priliku slušati govor odraslih govornika, čuti nove riječi, pratiti slijed pričanja, razmišljati o onome što čuje, učiti

o komunikacijskom uzusu – razgovornom bontonu. Što se tematskih preokupacija razgovora tijekom zajedničkoga obiteljskog blagovanja tiče, neizostavan je razgovor o samom jelu i jedenju (npr. *Dodaj mi sol, molim te.* ili *Zašto odvajáš grašak od riže?*), ali se razgovor proširuje i na druge teme, npr. na događaje u tom danu, na sjećanja, na priče o životu i iz života, na asocijacije potaknute čime iz okoline. U snimljenim situacijama zajedničkoga obiteljskog blagovanja (Beals, 2001) pokazalo se da se razgovori vode oko najrazličitijih sadržaja: raznih ljudi, mjesta, stvari i pojava, prisutnih i neprisutnih, u širokom tematskom rasponu. Ipak, može se reći da se neke teme ili preokupacije češće javljaju u razgovorima, a to je tema hrane (one koja je za stolom i hrane uopće), tema događaja iz škole/vrtića u tom danu i tema planova za ostatak dana i za sutra.

Pokazalo se (Snow i sur., 1995) da je sudjelovanje četverogodišnje i petogodišnje djece u razgovoru tijekom zajedničkoga blagovanja u obitelji pozitivno povezano s njihovim kasnijim školskim postignućima u području pismenosti i jezika. Točnije, djeca koja su više bila izložena razgovoru tijekom zajedničkoga blagovanja u obitelji pokazivala su bolje rezultate u provjeri poznavanja riječi, vještine definiranja riječi i razumijevanja teksta. Stoga Beals (2001, str. 91) predlaže roditeljima da sa svojom djecom, a u svrhu unaprjeđenja njihovih jezičnih vještina, svakodnevno razgovaraju; da im dopuste da sama usmjeravaju razgovor i određuju teme razgovora; da odgovaraju na dječja pitanja bez straha od toga da nisu mjerodavni u svim temama i područjima od dječjega interesa; da objasne djeci namjere ili motive onoga tko je što rekao, ili sebe sama, te da diskutiraju s djecom o tome; da se koriste i manje frekventnim i stručnim riječima jer tako izlažu djecu novim riječima; da objasne djeci njima nove riječi nudeći im sinonime; da potiču pripovijedanje djece o zbivanjima u njihovoj svakodnevici; da djeci pričaju o svojim doživljajima; da razgovaraju s djecom o planovima i željama za vrijeme koje će tek doći.

Zajednički obiteljski obroci poticajni su za dječji jezični razvoj uopće, a posebno za razvoj pripovjednih sposobnosti (Beals, 2001; Beals i Snow, 1994; Snow i Beals, 2006) te za bogaćenje rječnika (Beals, 1997; 2001; Beals i Tabors, 1995; Tabors, Beals i Weizman, 2001). Naime, slušajući druge u pripovijedanju i pripovijedajući o vlastitim doživljajima ili pak planovima za ostatak dana i za sutra te objašnjavajući svoje planove drugima, dijete uočava ključne elemente priče, slijed događaja, uzročno-posljedične veze među događajima te uvježbava segmentiranje događaja u manje epizode (sekvence) i organizaciju tih epizoda u jasnu priču. Na poticaj odraslih govornika dijete se uključuje u pripovijedanje i postaje supripovjedač nekog događaja te se tako razvija do samostalnoga pripovjedača nekog zbivanja. Osim toga, razgovor tijekom jela jedna je od komunikacijskih situacija u kojima dijete susreće nove riječi te uspostavlja odgovarajuće semantičke veze između onoga što čuje i onoga što već zna, odnosno između novih riječi i postojećih u svojem mentalnom leksikonu.

Da bi dijete i osjetilo sve opisane dobrobiti od zajedničkoga obiteljskog blagovanja, potrebno je da što češće bude u prilici biti s odraslima oko stola, sudjelovati u jelu i u razgovoru.

Navike zajedničkoga obiteljskog blagovanja u suvremenom djetinjstvu

Današnje društvo zapadnoga kulturnog kruga odlikuje se raznolikim obiteljima (s obzirom na njihovu strukturu, materijalni status te socijalno i kulturno okruženje u kojem žive) pa su raznolike i navike zajedničkoga blagovanja u obiteljima. Iako vrlo različito izražena, od kulture do kulture i od obitelji do obitelji, primjetna je tendencija prema smanjenju broja zajedničkih obroka u obitelji. Danas se najčešće u obiteljima zajednički blaguje jedan obrok, onaj po povratku roditelja s posla i djece iz škole/vrtića, a zajedničko blagovanje traje dvadesetak minuta (Beals, 2001; Fiese i Schwartz, 2008). Iako ne podjednako u svim kulturama, sve se češće u zapadnom društvu javlja i zajedničko obiteljsko jelo izvan doma (kuće/stana), obično u restoranu, ali i u automobilu, za vrijeme vožnje. Iako je točno da je svakodnevno zajedničko okupljanje za stolom danas u zapadnom svijetu znatno manje zastupljeno negoli je bilo prije, ostaje i danas činjenica da nijedna druga aktivnost ne okuplja članove obitelji tako često kao zajedničko jelo.

Što se učestalosti zajedničkoga blagovanja u obitelji tiče, ona je vrlo različita od podneblja do podneblja i od obitelji do obitelji. Znatne razlike u tome čini nezaposlenost ili zaposlenost roditelja i priroda njihova posla, ritam gradskoga ili seoskoga života, struktura obitelji i sl. Fiese i Schwatz (2008) donijeli su pregled istraživanja koja pokazuju, a prema anketiranju adolescenata, da se (u američkom društvu) zajednički blaguje u prosjeku pet puta tjedno u približno 60 % obitelji. Isti autori (str. 4) navode i podatak da učestalost zajedničkoga blagovanja u obitelji ovisi i o tome koje su dobi djeca, pa su tako zajednički obroci u obiteljima s mladom djecom i do četiri puta učestaliji negoli oni s adolescentima. Što se povezanosti strukture obitelji i učestalosti zajedničkih obroka tiče, istraživanja pokazuju da se češće zajednički jede u dvoroditeljskim obiteljima negoli u jednoroditeljskima (Levin, Kirby i Currie, 2012) Istraživanje učestalosti zajedničkih obroka u obitelji i statusa zaposlenosti roditelja (Fulkerson, Neumark-Sztainer i Story, 2006, Bianchi, 2011) pokazalo je da se češće zajednički jede u obiteljima u kojima je majka nezaposlena. Naime, za zajedničko blagovanje valja izdvojiti i vrijeme za pripremu ili nabavu jela, ne samo vrijeme za jelo.

Kad je o načinu i okolnostima zajedničkoga blagovanja riječ, danas su sve češće i elektronički mediji uključeni u taj obiteljski ritual. U kvalitativnom istraživanju provedenom u Hrvatskoj (Bilić, 2020) roditelji su potvrdili da mediji često ometaju njihovu obiteljsku komunikaciju za stolom. Autorica donosi i zaključke istraživanja koje su proveli Radesky i suradnici (2014 u Bilić, 2020) promatrajući ponašanje roditelja ili skrbnika s djecom do 10 godina u restoranima tijekom zajedničkoga jela. Utvrdili su da se od 55 promatranih obitelji u čak 40 njih roditelji ili skrbnici koriste mobitelom za vrijeme blagovanja s djecom, neki tek povremeno, a neki češće. Fiese i Schwartz (2008) ističu da gledanje televizije i korištenje medijima tijekom jela imaju brojne nepovoljne učinke za zdravlje (usredotočenost na medije tijekom jela smanjuje usmjeravanje pozornosti na znakove sitosti), za socijalni i emocionalni život članova

obitelji (koji prateći medijske sadržaje propuštaju mogućnost sudjelovanja u životnim sadržajima svojih bližnjih), kao i za dječji jezični razvoj.

Imajući na umu sve rečeno o dobrobiti razgovora uz zajedničko obiteljsko blagovanje za ukupni djetetov razvoj, a posebno za jezični razvoj, provedeno je istraživanje kojim se htjelo dobiti uvid u navike zajedničkoga blagovanja u obiteljima s malom djecom, u Republici Hrvatskoj.

Metoda istraživanja

Istraživanje je provedeno anketnim upitnikom namijenjenim roditeljima djece rane i predškolske dobi. Zbog razvoja epidemije COVID 19 anketni upitnik internetski je proveden u razdoblju od siječnja do lipnja 2020. godine. Sudjelovalo je 289 ispitanika (83 % žena i 17 % muškaraca). Najviše ispitanika ima obiteljsku strukturu koju čine dijete/djeca i dva roditelja (86,3 %), zatim slijede ispitanici obiteljske strukture dijete/djeca, roditelji i drugi članovi (18,2 %) te je najmanji broj ispitanika imao obiteljsku strukturu dijete/djeca i jedan roditelj (5,5 %). Prema statusu zaposlenja 94,5 % ispitanika bilo je zaposlenih, a 5,5 % nezaposlenih. Od svih sudionika srednju školu završilo je 20,1 %, a visoku 79,9 %.

Cilj istraživanja bio je ispitati navike zajedničkoga jela u obiteljima te utvrditi moguću povezanost učestalosti zajedničkoga jela i strukture obitelji ispitanika, kao i njihova zaposlenja i naobrazbe. Htjelo se utvrditi i prisutnost medijskih sadržaja tijekom zajedničkoga jela, kao i tematske odlike zajedničke komunikacije onih koji su okupljeni za stolom.

U skladu s time, postavljeno je pet istraživačkih hipoteza:

H1 – da će se češće zajednički blagovati u proširenim obiteljima (djeca, roditelji, baka/djed)

H2 – da će se češće zajednički blagovati u obiteljima gdje jedan od roditelja nije zaposlen

H3 – da će se češće zajednički blagovati u obiteljima gdje je roditelj nižega stupnja obrazovanja

H4 – da je obitelj tijekom zajedničkoga obroka značajno više orijentirana na TV program ili sadržaj digitalnoga medija nego na međusobnu komunikaciju

H5 – obitelji su vrlo različite s obzirom na teme o kojima najčešće razgovaraju tijekom zajedničkoga jela.

Rezultati

Kada govorimo o učestalosti zajedničkog objedovanja, najviše sudionika navodi da jednom dnevno jedu zajednički sa svojim djetetom/djecom (47,8 %), nešto ih manje to radi više puta dnevno (34,9 %) dok ih najmanje objeđuje zajedno sa svojom djecom više puta tjedno, no ne svaki dan (17,3 %).

Mann-Withneyjev test (Tablica 1) pokazao je kako ne postoji statistički značajna razlika u broju zajedničkih obroka između strukture obitelji dijete/djeca i jedan roditelj

i strukture dijete/djeca i dva roditelja ($U = 1935$, $p > 0,05$). Pokazalo se također da ne postoji statistički značajna razlika u broju zajedničkih obroka između strukture obitelji dijete/djeca i jedan roditelj i strukture dijete/djeca, roditelji, bake/ djedovi i dr. članovi ($U = 449$, $p > 0,05$). No između strukture obitelji dijete/djeca i roditelji te strukture dijete/djeca, roditelji, bake/djedovi, test je pokazao da postoji statistički značajna razlika u broju zajedničkih obroka ($U = 4300$, $p < 0,05$), pri čemu pripadnici strukture dijete/djeca, roditelji, bake/djedovi (središnji rang iznosi 160,81) češće objeđuju zajednički sa svojom obitelji od pripadnika strukture dijete/djeca i roditelji (središnji rang iznosi 128,82).

Tablica 1.

Nadalje, najveći broj sudionika navodi kako vrlo rijetko objeđuju sa svojim djetetom/ djecom izvan kuće (63,7 %), njih 32,2 % navodi da to rade jednom tjedno, a najmanji broj sudionika navodi da objeđuju izvan stambene jedinice dva do tri puta tjedno (4,2 %). To je prikazano u Tablici 2.

Tablica 2.

Pri provjeri druge hipoteze (H2) Hi-kvadrat test (Tablica 3) pokazao je da nezaposlene osobe statistički značajno ($\chi^2 = 20,484$, $p < 0,05$) češće objeđuju sa svojom djecom od zaposlenih. Pri tome postotak nezaposlenih osoba koje objeđuju više puta dnevno sa svojom obitelji iznosi 87,5 %, a onih koji objeđuju jednom dnevno 12,5 %. Također, broj zaposlenih osoba koje objeđuju s djecom više puta tjedno iznosi 18,2 %, više puta dnevno 32,1 %, a jednom dnevno 49,6 %.

Tablica 3.

Nadalje, pri provjeri treće hipoteze (H3) pokazalo se kako postoji statistički značajna razlika ($\chi^2 = 19,239$, $p < 0,05$) u broju zajedničkih objeđivanja s obzirom na stručnu spremu roditelja. Tablica 4 prikazuje kako visokoobrazovani ispitanici najčešće zajednički objeđuju jednom dnevno, dok ispitanici sa završenom srednjom školom zajednički objeđuju više puta dnevno (29,4 %).

Tablica 4.

Za testiranje četvrtre hipoteze (H4), da je obitelj tijekom zajedničkoga obroka značajno više orijentirana na televizijski program ili sadržaj digitalnoga medija nego na međusobnu komunikaciju, proveden je t-test koji je pokazao da su sudionici značajno više ($p < 0,01$) orijentirani na međusobnu komunikaciju ($M = 2,63$, $SD = 0,40$) nego na digitalne medije ($M = 2,10$, $SD = 0,77$), što je prikazano u Tablici 5.

Tablica 5.

Prilikom zajedničkoga objeđivanja ispitanici koji su više orijentirani na međusobnu komunikaciju, tematski najviše razgovaraju o svakodnevnim događajima (59,5 %), u ponešto manjem postotku međusobno komentiraju digitalni sadržaj u pozadini (30,2 %) te se u najmanjem postotku u svojem razgovoru osvrću na minule događaje (10,3 %).

Rasprava

Istraživanje je pokazalo da se u većini hrvatskih obitelji zajednički blaguje jednom dnevno (47,8 %) ili više puta dnevno (34,9 %), odnosno da je učestalost zajedničkoga blagovanja nešto viša od očekivane, prema podacima iz literature (Beals, 2001; Fiese i Schwartz, 2008).

Pokazalo se da postoji statistički značajna razlika u broju zajedničkih obroka između obitelji različite strukture. Statistički značajno češće zajednički se blaguje u obiteljima proširene strukture (dijete/djeca, roditelj/roditelji, baka/djed). Time se potvrdila prva istraživačka hipoteza. Prema podacima iz ovoga istraživanja, u suvremenom je hrvatskom društvu, iako ne većinski, značajno prisutna proširena obitelj. U takvoj se obitelji, pokazuju rezultati, češće zajednički objeđuje negoli u obitelji dijete/djeca i dva roditelja. Izgleda da su članovi starije generacije ti koji u današnjim obiteljima njeguju tradiciju zajedničkoga objedovanja. S druge pak strane, za razliku od istraživanja (Levin, Kirby i Currie, 2012), ovim se istraživanjem utvrdilo kako ne postoji statistički značajna razlika u broju zajedničkih obroka između strukture obitelji s dvama i s jednim roditeljem. Moguće je da je do takvoga rezultata došlo jer se anketni upitnik popunjavao u kritičnom razdoblju pandemije (razdoblje *zatvaranja*) kada se većina poslova izvršavala od kuće pa su obitelji puno više blagovale zajedno upravo zbog.

Rezultati ovoga istraživanja nisu potvrdili tendenciju suvremenoga roditeljstva i obiteljskoga života prema zajedničkom jelu izvan kuće. Za razliku od prikazanoga stanja u literaturi (Fiese i Schwartz, 2008), rezultati ovoga istraživanja pokazali kako većina obitelji (63,7 %) vrlo rijetko zajednički objeđuje izvan doma. Ovaj rezultat također je moguće pripisati ispunjavanju anketnoga upitnika u kritičnom razdoblju suvremene pandemije kada je objedovanje izvan kuće bilo slabije dostupno.

Ovim se istraživanjem potvrdila pretpostavka da se češće zajednički objeđuje u obiteljima u kojima je jedan od roditelja (najčešće majka) nezaposlen. Nezaposleni ispitanici najčešće su odgovarali da se u njihovoj obitelji zajednički blaguje više puta dnevno, a zaposleni da to čine jednom. Time je ovo istraživanje potvrdilo nalaze drugih istraživanja (Fulkerson, Neumark-Sztainer i Story, 2006; Bianchi, 2011; Hearst i sur., 2012) koji pokazuju da se češće zajednički jede u obiteljima u kojima je majka nezaposlena.

Potvrđena je i treća istraživačka hipoteza nalazom ovoga istraživanja da se u obiteljima ispitanika visoke stručne spreme najčešće zajednički objeđuje jednom dnevno, dok se u obiteljima ispitanika srednje stručne spreme zajednički objeđuju više puta dnevno. Time se potvrdila i treća istraživačka hipoteza. Vjerojatno je da ispitanici visoke stručne spreme imaju posao koji od njih traži više vremena te su značajno usmjereni na karijeru, pa se i manje posvećuju obiteljskim zajedničkim ritualima.

S obzirom na primijećene promjene u suvremenom roditeljstvu, a koje se odnose na prekomjerno uključivanje digitalnih medija u odgoj i život s djecom, pa i u zajedničko objedovanje (Fiese i Schwartz, 2008; Bilić, 2020), postavljena je i pretpostavka da se tijekom zajedničkoga objedovanja više pozornosti daje sadržajima digitalnih medija

nego međusobnoj komunikaciji. Međutim, rezultati ovoga istraživanja to nisu potvrdili, dapače, 80 % ispitanika navelo je kako su pri zajedničkom jelu usmjereni na razgovor, ne na medije. Time četvrta istraživačka hipoteza nije potvrđena.

Tematski se najviše razgovara o svakodnevnim događajima u obitelji. Time se peta hipoteza nije potvrdila jer je više od polovine ispitanika izdvojilo svakodnevne događaje kao najčešću temu razgovora. Takvo dijeljenje vlastitih dnevnih događanja među članovima obitelji, kako je prikazano u teorijskom dijelu rada, može biti dobar poticaj djeci za usvajanja vokabulara i aktivno sudjelovanje u komunikaciji. Ipak, treba reći da na ovoj čestici ispitivanja valja uzeti u obzir tendenciju ispitanika prema davanju socijalno poželjnih odgovora.

Zaključak

Prikazano istraživanje navika zajedničkoga blagovanja u hrvatskim obiteljima, iako ograničena dosega što proizlazi iz provedbe istraživanja u okolnostima suvremene pandemije koja je znatno izmijenila i obiteljske navike, uglavnom je potvrdilo u literaturi opisana obilježja obiteljskoga zajedničkog jela. Ukazalo je i na nešto izraženiju naviku zajedničkoga jela više puta dnevno, posebno u obiteljima u kojima su uz djecu i roditelje prisutni baka i/ili djed. Pokazalo se, očekivanjima usprkos, i to da se u hrvatskim obiteljima tijekom zajedničkoga jela ne pridaje veća pozornost medijima. Sve to govori o vrlo živoj navici obiteljskoga blagovanja i njegovanja međusobnoga razgovora. Zajedničko objedovanje i danas je često jedino mjesto i vrijeme u kojem je obitelj na okupu i ima priliku zajednički komunicirati. Iz toga proizlazi i poticajnost zajedničkoga blagovanja za dječji razvoj u cjelini, a posebno za razvoj govora, bogaćenje vokabulara te unaprjeđenje vještina razgovora i pripovijedanja.