

Acquisition of Case Markers in Typically Developing Malayalam Speaking Children

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Abstract

This study aims to establish a descriptive data on acquisition of case markers in typically developing 3-8 years old Malayalam speaking children. Fifty normal school going children were grouped according to age basis and were provided with the picture description task. Picture stimuli of each case marker were used for sample collection. Responses were marked on work sheet separately and each session was recorded for further detailed analysis. Result indicated that the children in older group performed well compared to younger group in all case markers. In the current study it is found that as the age increased, the ability to use correct case marker has improved.

Key words: Typically developing children, case markers, Malayalam

Introduction

The part of morphology that covers the relationship between syntax and morphology is called morpho-syntax, and it concerns itself with inflection and paradigms, but not with word-formation or compounding. Morpho-syntax encompasses linguistic strategies and operations to represent syntactic features via morphological marking as opposed to merely combinatorial or syntactic strategies. Morpho-syntactic operations are the relation between one linguistic form and another that correlates with a conventionalized meaning distinction. The morpho-syntactical aspects include plural markers, case markers, PNG markers etc. Case markers as a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads. Case is a

grammatical category whose value reflects the grammatical function performed by a noun or

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pronoun. The major types of case markers are nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental, locative and sociative.

Morpho-syntactical studies in the Indian context would aid in assessment and help in establishing the baseline to set goals for morphological intervention in disabled children. The lack of acquisition data has hinged in the development of any standardized tests in Malayalam. There is a need of more normative data of acquisition grammatical in Malayalam language. The present study attempts to understand the case markers in Malayalam speaking typically developing children.

<http://www.personal.uni-jena.de/~x4dih0/Morphosyntax.Introduction.pdf>

Review of Literature

Human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals such as vocal sound, gestures, signs or written symbols is succinctly defines as language. But Language is far too complicated intriguing, and mysterious to be adequately explained by a brief definition. Contemporary views of human language hold that language is a rule based behavior which evolves within specific historical, social, and cultural context and is described by at least five parameters - phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. Language learning and use are determined by the interaction of biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors.

The acquisition of language is still a controversial research issue which is struggling between biologically, genetically, evolutionarily and psychologically based explanations.

Brown (2009) reported that early word utterances are telegraphic because the utterances contain only the content word such as nouns, verbs and adjectives but miss out inflections and grammatical functional words. The emergence of morpho-syntactical aspects makes the utterances more meaningful and better grammatically organized. The acquisition of morpho-syntactic aspects of language is a controversial issue which is still the area of research interest. Morphology is the aspect of language concerned with the rule governing change in word

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meaning. The morpho-syntax is the system of the internal structure of words (morphology) and the way in which words are put together to form phrases and sentences. The morpho-syntactical aspects include plural markers, case markers, PNG markers etc.

The languages of India belong to different language families like Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, etc. There are hundreds of languages in India. The Dravidian languages are highly agglutinative. Words are usually formed by adding suffixes to the root word serially in these languages. When compared with the research on morphological development in English speakers, there is scarcity of studies in the Dravidian languages, in normal as well as clinical populations.

Malayalam is a language of the Dravidian family and is one of the four major languages of this family with a rich literary tradition, Malayalam has a rich morphology, and identifying the morphological suffixes of Malayalam verbs and nouns is a tough task.

In Malayalam case system, various suffixes are added to noun stem to indicate different relationships between the noun and other constituents of the sentence. The various case markers are nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental, locative and sociative.

Case markers	Significance	Malayalam Case markers	English case markers	Examples
Nominative	Denote subject	-	-	/kutti padunnu / The child is singing.
Accusative	Denote object	എ /e/	-	/kuttiye vazhakku paranju / The child was scolded.
Genitive	Denote possession	ഉടെ /ude/, ന്റെ/nte/	Of, belongs to	/ramante pena/ Rama's pen

Dative	Indicate purpose	കു /ke/,നീ/ne/	To , for	/aanaik karimbu ishtamanu/ Elephant likes sugarcane
Instrumental	Denote agent	ആലു/aal/	With,by	/ravanan ramanal kollapettu/ Ravana was killed by Rama.
Locative1	Denote place or situation	ഇലു /il/	In On Among Between	/kili marathil irikkunnu/ The bird is sitting on the tree.
Locative2	Denote place or situation	കലു/kal/	In On Among Between	/padikkal vilakkirikkunnu/ Lamp is on the doorstep.
Sociative	Denote social action	ഓടു/od/	-	/ kutty ammay <u>o</u> d vellam chodichu / The child asked mother for water.

Table 1: showing various case markers in Malayalam and their significance

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/96257753/Grammar-Malayalam-SANDHI#scribd>

Jia and Fuse (2007) investigated the acquisition of grammatical morphemes in Mandarin speaking children and concluded that acquisition of grammatical morphemes by school aged immigrants takes several years to complete.

Roberts & Anderson (2007) agreed with these findings as they noted delays in transitioning from one to two words in speech. Furthermore, this type of delay progresses into multi-word speech evidenced by a decreased Mean Length of Utterance (MLU).

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The research in language acquisition is the basis for the development of any assessment material. In India various attempts were made by the pioneers of our field to study language acquisition. Subbarao (1995) described the language of typically developing Kannada speaking children and concluded that genitive case, dative case and locative case usages were more compared to the use of instrumental, accusative or sociative cases.

Vijayalakshmi (1981) studied children in the age range of 1-5 years using the test of acquisition of syntax in Kannada (STASK). Results showed that the children used time, gender, number, case and person markers as well as prepositions, determiners, adverbs and adjectives. There was an increase in frequency as age advanced. The simple present and future habitual terms for both masculine and feminine forms were noticed in the age range of 3-4 years in the subjects using Kannada language.

Rukmini (1994) developed a Malayalam language test for children in the age range of 4-7 years. The test has 2 parts, semantics and syntax. Each part has 11 subsections with 5 items each for expression and reception except semantic discrimination (only reception) and lexical category (only expression). The test was administered to ninety Malayalam speaking children in the age range of 4-7 years. The results indicated that the scores increased with increasing age. Children performed better in the reception task on the expression task. Also they performed better on syntactic and semantic tasks.

Rupela & Manjula (2007) studied the development of morphological categories of Kannada in children between 6 to 8 years age and reported that they used genders, plurals and tenses correctly.

Shastry (2010) studied acquisition of tense markers in Kundapura Kannada-speaking typically developing children. From her study on 30 children she reported that frequency of occurrence of present tense markers were more when compared to other tense markers. There

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were dialectal variations which were frequently observed in present tense forms. She concluded that frequency of occurrence of present tense markers were more when compared to other tenses.

Pokharel (2012) reported a study on acquisition of case markers in typically- developing Nepali children using narration task as well as picture description task and the results showed that there was a gradual increment in the development of all case marker types with the age.

Need of the Study

As observed from the literature review, Indian studies of acquisition of language, syntactic aspects in general and morphological structures in particular, are not frequent. Morpho-syntactical studies in the Indian context would aid in assessment and help in establishing the baseline to set goals for morphological intervention in disabled children. The lack of acquisition data has hindered in the development of any standardized tests in Malayalam. There is a need of more normative data of acquisition of grammatical elements in Malayalam language. The present study attempts to understand the case markers in Malayalam speaking typically developing children.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study is to report on the acquisition of case markers in typically developing Malayalam speaking children in the age range of 3-8 years.

Subjects

50 typically developing Malayalam speaking children in the age group of 3 to 8 years were further divided into 3-4 years, 4-5 years, 5-6 years, 6-7 years and 7-8 years with 10 members in each groups participating in the present study. Equal number of males and females were assigned in each group.

Inclusion Criteria

- Age range 3-8 years according to school register
- Attending Malayalam medium school

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- Malayalam as first language

Exclusion Criteria

- No speech and language problem
- No neurological problems
- No hearing abnormality
- No known disease or disorders

Stimulus Used

Picture description task was used. Common case markers in Malayalam were identified and appropriate picture stimuli were used for each case marker.

Recording Environment

The entire session was audio recorded using microphone attached to Micromax A117 smart phone. The recording environment was a quiet room in the school building.

Data Collection

The data was collected from each individual by presenting picture stimuli via PowerPoint presentation in Dell Inspiron N5040 laptop and subjects were instructed to describe the picture using sentences. Responses with appropriate case markers were considered as correct response. Inappropriate case markers as well as omission of case markers were considered as incorrect response.

Analysis

The study envisioned obtaining an audiotaped conversational sample from normal speaking children. The audiotaped samples were analyzed at the syntactic level primarily focusing on case markers. The presence of unit of analysis was noted and marked as '1' and absence or usage of inappropriate case marker was noted and marked as '0'. The total number of each case marker was tabulated.

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Results and Discussion

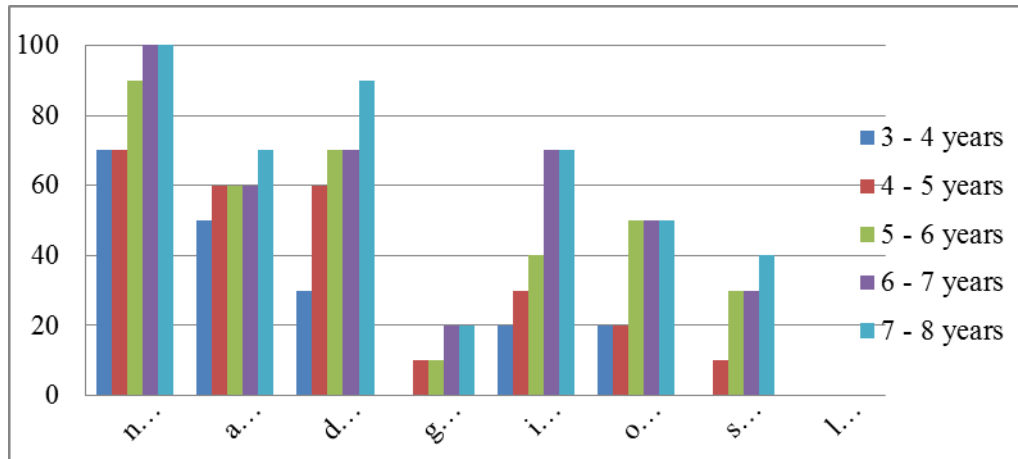


Fig 1: Acquisition of case markers (in percentage) in typically developing Malayalam speaking children of age range 3-8years

The youngest population in the sample was 3-4 years. Nominative, accusative and Locative 1 were well developed (100%, 90% and 70% respectively). Other case markers were less than 45%. Locative 2 was not present in this population.

Most children in age group of 4-5 years have acquired nominative, accusative and locative 1 case marker types (100%, 90% and 80% respectively). Dative, genitive and instrumental case marker types showed acquisition of 70% whereas the sociative showed 60% of acquisition. Locative 2 was not present among this group.

Children in age group of 5-6 years have acquired nominative accusative, dative, sociative and genitive case marker types (100% , 90%, 90% , 90%, 90% and 90% respectively). Locative 1 and instrumental case marker types showed acquisition of 80%. Locative 2 was not present among this group.

Among 6-7 years old children nominative accusative and locative1 showed 100% acquisition and rest all other case markers except locative 2 showed 90% acquisition.

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7-8 year old children were the eldest group in this study. All the case marker types except locative 2 showed 100 % acquisition.

Exceptional Cases

It can be clearly observed from the above figures that locative 2 case markers (/kal/) are not used by any of the age groups. This odd finding can be due to the fact that this particular case marker is not commonly used even by adults in normal conversation. This case marker is mainly used in higher level language usage, For e.g. in literary works).

The present study is in accordance with Pokharel (2012), which says that there is a gradual increase in the development of all the case marker types with increase in age, i.e., older children have acquired more number of case markers than younger children in a study done on Nepali speaking typically developing children.

Summary and Conclusion

Malayalam is an agglutinative morphologically rich language in which identifying the morphological suffixes of Malayalam verbs and nouns is tough task. Morphology is the aspect of language concerned with the rule governing change in word meaning. The morpho-syntactical aspects include plural markers, case markers, PNG markers, etc. Blake (1981) defines case markers as a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads. Acquisition of morpho-syntactic structures is still the area which needs lots of research explanation.

The present study aimed at reporting the acquisition of case markers in typically developing Malayalam speaking children in the age range of 3-8 years. The results revealed that there is a general increase in the acquisition as well as frequency of usage of any type of case markers with increase in age of the children.

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Nominative, locative and acquisitive case marker types are the most developed type of case markers in any age groups whereas instrumental, genitive, sociative and dative are least developed in earlier ages compared to other case marker types. As an exceptional case, Locative 2 case markers (/kal/) are not used by any of the age groups.

Hence, these case markers should be taken for intervention only when all other types of case markers have been acquired. Normative data is essential as this acts as the data for control group when determining the acquisition of morpho-syntax in clinical populations like Down syndrome, Specific language impairment, Autism spectrum disorders, etc.

Limitation of the Present Study

The small sample size taken as well as the subjects taken from the similar community, i.e. from a single dialectal population, is the limitation of the study as it affects the generalization of the study to the whole Kerala population.

Future Implications

1. To include more number of subject as well as include various dialectal communities.
2. Sampling points of data can be increased.
3. More research work needed on language use by the disordered population.

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