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Brown's Morphological Skills in Typically Developing Trilingual (Konkani-English Kannada) Speaking Children

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Abstract

An individual is exposed to more than one language, with increasing mobility or globalization. Relatively little research has been conducted on children's English grammatical development in trilinguals. The present study aimed to understand the usage of Browns morphological skills in context of general conversation and picture discrimination in 6-9 years Konkani- English- Kannada trilingual children. Speech samples were audio taped from 45 school going (Konkani- English- Kannada) trilingual speakers. Collection of samples included tasks of picture discrimination and clinician child conversation. Language data obtained was analysed, based on Brown's (1973) 14 grammatical morphemes. Results showed that out of 14 morphemes only 6 and 8 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 6-7 years children, 8 and 8 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 7-8 years children, and 9 and 10 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 8-9 years children. Concluded that Konkani- English- Kannada trilingual children followed a different morphological development pattern when compared to the typically developing monolingual English children.

Key words: Brown's 14 grammatical morphemes, trilingual speakers, Konkani language.

Introduction

Language is the key vehicle for communication. Language is a set of arbitrary signs used by a group of people for the purpose of communication. Understanding of language requires the explanation of terms symbol and arbitrary (Owens, 2008). Language is the systematic and

conventional use of sounds for the purpose of communication on self- expression. Language is complex and multifaceted (Crystal, 1995).

Morphology is the feature of language concerned with the rules governing change in word meaning. A morpheme is a word or part of a word that conveys meaning. Many words can be broken down into minor units that can be used to convey meaning. Grammatical morphemes such as the present progressive '– ing', the regular past '–ed' and the plural '-s' are defined as "bound" in that' they function as symbols or tags that are used to change the meaning when attached to a word. Other grammatical morphemes such as in', 'on', 'a' and 'the' are described as "free" because they can stand alone, modifying another word but not attached to it.

Grammatical morphemes are noticeably absent in children's early word combinations. Children firstly use word order to convey meaning, even those children acquiring highly inflected languages. But as their mean length of utterances in morphemes (MLU) approaches 2.5, morphemes such as the past tense and plural inflections and prepositions such as *in* and *on begin to appear*. Soon after their first 50 words, at around 18 months of age, toddlers begin to combine words into two – word phrases. Between 2 and 5 years of age, pre-schoolers will develop the capability to use grammatical morphemes, produce basic grammatical sentence types and combine those into even more advanced grammatical structures. The emergence of these grammatical morphemes begins early in the preschool years. Although other important aspects of language are also emerging, as these grammatical morphemes gradually develop, the pre-schoolers' language takes on a more mature, adult like texture.

Dale (1980) indicated that the bilingual group exhibited a lower percent of accuracy across all morphemes when compared to the monolingual expectations.

Paradis, Nichladis, Crago & Genesee (2011) argued that some differences in morphology might appear as errors in English as the second language, which is caused by the transfer of the grammatical rules from the child's first language.

Steckol & Leonard (1979) studied grammatical morpheme usage of normal children and language impaired children matched at two different levels of mean length utterance length. The language impaired children displayed less grammatical morpheme usage than the normal children with equivalent mean utterance length.

Varghese & Kumaraswamy (2013) studied browns morphological skills in Kannada-English bilinguals on 5-7 years children's. Result revealed presence of 4 morphemes and absence of 8 morphemes.

Varghese, Thomas, Nebu, Sunny & Kumaraswamy (2014) studied browns morphological skills in Malayalam- English bilinguals on 5-7 years children's. Result showed that the presence of 6 morphemes in picture discrimination task and presence of 8 morphemes in general conversation task.

Need of the Study

Relatively little research has been conducted on children's English grammatical development in trilinguals. Earlier studies focused on western languages. In the current study, we take a small step toward morphological development in Konkani- Kannada-English trilinguals. Speech language pathologists need to understand typical English third language acquisition and how it differs from bilingual and monolingual English in order to accurately assess and effectively identify potential language disorders as early as possible.

Aim

The aim of the study was to determine the order of acquisition of English morphological structures produced by Konkani- Kannada- English bilingual children and which morphological structures mastered by 6-9 years.

Methodology

The present study aimed to find which morphological structures were achieved by 6 -9 year (Konkani-English-Kannada) typically developing trilingual children.

45 typically developing children further divided into three groups (15 each in the age range of 6-7, 7-8 and 8-9 years) participated in the present study.

Inclusive Criteria

As per school record and teachers input:

- Speaking Konkani as native language.
- English as second language.
- Kannada as third language.
- Attends English medium school since kindergarten.

Exclusive Criteria

- No history of speech, language and hearing problem.
- No history of middle ear infections.
- No neurological deficit.

Stimulus and Equipment

Stimulus preparation was done based on the three experienced speech language pathologists view, six colour card were depicting the activities of school, home and playground were chosen for picture description task. A conversation sample between clinician- child and picture card description (school, playground and home) was recorded using PRAAT software 5.3 14 version (Boersma & Weenink, 2007).

Procedure and Scoring

Test was administered in a quiet room with adequate illumination. The subject was seated next to the examiner 1 foot distance in front of the standard notebook with inbuilt microphone. Child was asked to sit in a chair and six picture cards were given to him, one after the other which he had to describe the activities happened in the picture card. The instruction by the clinician was given in English for conversation sample and for picture description task. For

the above two task the client has to describe in full and meaningful sentence. If the participants were not able to say in complete sentence, semantic cues were given only once.

A score of one for presence of morphemes and zero for absence was obtained. The audio recorded samples were transcribed using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) -5 and analysed for morphological structures. The data was statistically analysed using Kruskal Walli's test to find the significant difference of morphemes present in trilinguals and as well as the pattern of the morphemic development to have a general idea about the trilingual Konkani – English-Kannada speakers English morphemic development. The identified morphemes were compared with browns 14 stages and checked for order of acquisition and its relevance in Konkani-English- Kannada trilinguals.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the present study was to determine which English morphemes were produced by 6- 9 years (Konkani-English-Kannada) typically developing trilingual children. Each subject's utterances were analysed separately for the acquisition of 14 Brown's morphological skills. The obtained data was statistically analysed and results were discussed below.

Task: Picture description

	Age group	N	Mean	SD	Median	Kruskal wallis test	p value
Present progressive – ing	6-7	15	15.07	3.990	14.00	24.180	0.000
	7-8	15	22.60	4.469	22.00		HS
	8-9	15	24.60	3.397	25.00		
In	6-7	15	.40	.737	.00	19.7	0.00
	7-8	15	1.73	1.486	2.00		HS
	8-9	15	3.00	1.690	2.00		
On	6-7	15	.00	.000	.00	32.1	0.00
	7-8	15	.07	.258	.00		HS
	8-9	15	2.07	1.668	2.00		
Plurals –s, es	6-7	15	1.13	1.246	1.00	21.014	0.00
	7-8	15	4.07	1.870	5.00		HS
	8-9	15	4.80	2.624	5.00		
Past irregular- went	6-7	15	.00	.000	.00	6.286	.043
	7-8	15	.00	.000	.00		SIG
	8-9	15	.20	.414	.00		
Uncnttbl copula–am, is, are	6-7	15	6.60	3.112	7.00	31.503	.000
	7-8	15	15.00	4.342	14.00		HS
	8-9	15	19.80	5.158	20.00		
Possessive + s (mommy' s)	6-7	15	.O7	.258	.00	7.571	.023
	7-8	15	.67	.900	.00		SIG
	8-9	15	.13	.516	.00		
A, the (articles)	6-7	15	1.20	1.656	1.00	23.196	0.00
	7-8	15	9.80	5.493	8.00		HS
	8-9	15	16.80	9.872	18.00		
Past irregular –ed, d, t	6-7	15	.00	.000	.000	.000	1.000
	7-8	15	.00	.000	.000		HS
	8-9	15	.00	.000	.000		
3rd person regular (+s, talks, runs)	6-7	15	.00	.000	.000	.000	1.000
	7-8	15	.00	.000	.000		HS
	8-9	15	.00	.000	.000		
3rd person irregular (does, has)	6-7	15	.00	.000	.00	.000	1.000
	7-8	15	.00	.000	.00		HS
	8-9	15	.00	.000	.00		
Uncnctbl auxillary (am,is, are)	6-7	15	.00	.000	.00	6.204	1.000
	7-8	15	1.13	2.264	.00		HS
	8-9	15	1.73	2.939	.00		
Contractbl copula (m, 's, 're)	6-7	15	.00	.000	.00	.000	1.000
	7-8	15	.00	.000	.00		HS
	8-9	15	.00	.000	.00		
Contracnl auxillary – 're (there running)	6-7	15	.00	.000	.00	.000	1.000
	7-8	15	.00	.000	.00		HS
	8-9	15	.00	.000	.00		

Table 1: showing the mean and standard deviation of Brown's morphemes for picture description task.

From the above table it clearly shows that out of the 14 grammatical morphemes only nine morphemes showed highly significant difference (p = .000) among three age groups and three morphemes having significant difference across three age groups. Present progressive (–ing) was observed to be an early developing morpheme. Out of nine morphemes, past irregular (- went) was the least used.

Type: General conversation:

	Age group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Kruskal wallis test	p
Present progressive – ing	6--7	15	6.93	3.305	7.00	.920	.631
	7--8	15	7.33	3.374	7.00		
	8 -- 9	15	6.47	3.137	6.00		
In	6--7	15	.33	.617	.00	16.781	.000
	7--8	15	1.87	.990	2.00		HS
	8 -- 9	15	1.93	1.387	2.00		
On	6--7	15	.00	.000	.00	4.356	.113
	7--8	15	.33	.617	.00		
	8 -- 9	15	.20	.414	.00		
Plurals – s,es	6--7	15	.33	.617	.00	5.649	.059
	7--8	15	1.27	1.335	1.00		
	8 -- 9	15	.93	.884	1.00		
Past irregular- went,	6--7	15	.00	.000	.00	21.749	.000
	7--8	15	.00	.000	.00		HS
	8 -- 9	15	.93	1.033	1.00		
Uncntctbl copula- am, is, are, was	6--7	15	1.33	1.047	1.00	4.301	.116
	7--8	15	3.13	3.815	1.00		
	8 -- 9	15	2.07	1.100	2.00		
Possessive + 's (mommy's)	6--7	15	1.33	.900	2.00	6.044	.049
	7--8	15	1.53	1.125	2.00		sig
	8 -- 9	15	2.13	.743	2.00		
A, the (articles)	6--7	15	.27	.594	.00	3.177	.204
	7--8	15	.87	1.246	.00		
	8 -- 9	15	1.00	1.309	.00		
Past irregular-ed,d,t	6--7	15	.00	.000	.00	4.093	.129
	7--8	15	.00	.000	.00		
	8 -- 9	15	.13	.352	.00		
3rd person regular + s, talks, runs	6--7	15	.0000	.00000	.0000	.000	1.000
	7--8	15	.0000	.00000	.0000		
	8 -- 9	15	.0000	.00000	.0000		
3rd reson irregular (does, has)	6--7	15	.0000	.00000	.0000	.000	1.000
	7--8	15	.0000	.00000	.0000		
	8 -- 9	15	.0000	.00000	.0000		
Uncntrbl auxillary (am, is, are, has,have)	6--7	15	.07	.258	.00	1.338	.512
	7--8	15	.13	.352	.00		
	8 -- 9	15	.33	.724	.00		
Contracbl copula- ('m, 's, 're),	6--7	15	.0000	.00000	.0000	.000	1.000
	7--8	15	.0000	.00000	.0000		
	8 -- 9	15	.0000	.00000	.0000		
Cntracbl auxllry - -'re (they re running)	6--7	15	.07	.258	.00	2.000	.368
	7--8	15	.00	.000	.00		
	8 -- 9	15	.00	.000	.00		

Table 2: showing the mean and standard deviation of evaluated Brown's morphemes in general conversation task.

From the above table it is evident that out of the 14 grammatical morphemes only three morphemes had highly significant difference (p = .000) among three age groups and

one morpheme possessive (-ing) shown significant difference between three age ranges. Present progressive (–ing) was observed to be an early developing morpheme. Out of nine used morphemes, past irregular (-ed, t) was the least used.

Discussion

The present study described about the presence of morphological structures achieved by 6-9 years trilingual (Konkani – Kannada- English) children. More specially, accuracy in production of Brown's (1973) 14 grammatical morphemes were matched between Konkani – Kannada- English speaking children, who had been expected only to communicate in Konkani at home before entering kindergarten. Results showed that in picture description task out of 14 morphemes only 6 morphemes were used and for conversation task 8 morphemes were used by children in 6-7 age group, out of 14 morphemes only 8 and 8 were used in picture description and general conversation task in 7-8 years children, 9 and 10 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 8-9 years children respectively which are in agreement with Bland- Stewart and Fitzgerald (2001).

Summary and Conclusion

Language is a complex and dynamic system of conventional symbols that is used in various modes for thought and communication. Contemporary views of human language holds that, language evolves within specific historical, social and cultural context; language is a rule governed behaviour described by a least five parameters phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic language learning and use are determined by interaction of biological, cognitive, psychological and environmental factors (American Speech and Hearing Association, 1982).

An individual is exposed to more than one language, with increasing mobility or globalization. Hence an individual must or should know more than one language i.e. be bilingual or multilingual to be an efficient communicator. Bilingualism means a person who knows more than one language (Mackay, 1962). The American Heritage Dictionary defines a trilingual person as someone who is using or able to use three languages, especially with equal fluency or nearly equal fluency. However differences in morphologic language development may be observed when considering children learning two languages. Under the

assumptions of a usage based theory of language acquisition (Tomasello, 2003) language input and age have important role for children's morphologic language development.

Relatively little research has been conducted on children's English grammatical development in trilinguals. The present study aimed to understand the usage of Browns morphological skills in context of general conversation and picture discrimination in 6-9 years Konkani- English-Kannada trilingual children. Speech samples were audio taped from 45 school going (Konkani- English-Kannada) trilingual speakers. Collection of samples included tasks of picture discrimination and clinician child conversation. Language data obtained was analysed, based on Brown's (1973) 14 grammatical morphemes. Statistical analysis was carried out further using Kruskalwalli test. Results showed that out of 14 morphemes only 6 and 8 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 6-7 years children, 8 and 8 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 7-8 years children, 9 and 10 morphemes were present in picture task and general conversation in 8-9 years children respectively which are in accordance with Bland-stewart and Fitzgerald (2001). Konkani- English- Kannada trilingual children followed a different morphological development pattern when compared to the typically developing monolingual English children.

Clinical Implications

This data will be useful for speech language pathologists to understand typical English third language acquisition and how it differs from monolingual and bilingual English in order to accurately assess and effectively identify potential language disorders as early as possible. Also the results can be used to compare with language disordered group.

Limitations

Inadequate sample size. A wider age range would have yielded a more reliable result.

Future Directions

Study can be carried out across various Indian languages. Study can be carried across different language impaired population.

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