

Acquisition of Plural Markers in Typically Developing Malayalam Speaking Children

Vishnu V. K., Sreelakshmi R., Nandhu S Mohan, and Satish Kumaraswamy

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Abstract

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

Key words: Typically developing children, plural markers, Malayalam

Introduction

Morpho-syntax is the study of grammatical categories or linguistic units that have both morphological and syntactic properties which includes case markers, plural markers, tense markers, person markers, number markers, gender markers, etc. A Plural Marker is a suffix or prefix which is attached to a word to modify meaning or relates to other words in a sentence.

India is a country of diversity; hence we have variety of languages which can be classified under different language families, namely, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, and Tibeto-Burman. Morpho-syntactic markers are more in Indian languages compared to western languages. Malayalam is a Dravidian language, spoken predominantly in the state of Kerala.

Review of Literature

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The acquisition of language is multi-pronged research issue with biological, genetic, evolution and psychology based explanations.

Theodore, Demuth, & Shattuck (2011) studied Acoustic Evidence for Positional and Complexity Effects on Children’s Production of Plural -s and found that plural production was more robust in utterance-final versus utterance-medial position.

Rice & Oetting (1993) studied Plural Acquisition in Children with Specific Language Impairment. The findings suggest that by 5 years of age, children with SLI demonstrate productive and differentiated plural systems.

Kumaraswamy, Sreelakshmi & Mohan (2015) studied the acquisition of case markers as well as tense markers in typically developing Malayalam speaking children and correlated the increase in acquisition with age.

Plural markers can be classified as irregular as well as regular plural markers. Regular plural markers are the frequently used markers in Tamil like /kal/ whereas irregular plural markers are less commonly used markers (e.g. /ayal-avar/)

The major plural markers and their significance as well as the morphemes used in Malayalam for representing each case marker are presented below.

PLURAL MARKERS – REGULAR MARKERS	Example
/kal/	/Pu:ve/- /pu:kal/
/ngal/	/maram/ - /marangal/
/ma:r/	/sundari/- /sundarima:r
/ka:r/	/kadaka:ran/-/kadaka:r/
PLURAL MARKERS – IRREGULAR MARKERS	Examples

/r/	/manu an/ - /manu ar/
/ayal-avar/	/ayal-avar/
/athe-ava/	/athe-ava/

Table 1: showing various plural markers in Malayalam

Need of the Study

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

Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study was to report on the acquisition of plural 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 ranges 3-4 years, 4-5 years, 5-6 years, 6-7 years and 7-8 years with 10 members in each groups participated in the present study. To each group equal number of males and females were assigned.

Inclusion criteria

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

Exclusion criteria

- No speech and language problem
- No neurological problems

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- No hearing abnormality
- No known disease or disorders

Stimulus Used

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

Recording Environment

The entire session was audio recorded using microphone attached to Micromax Unit A206 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 were instructed to describe the picture in sentences. Responses with appropriate plural markers were considered as correct response. Inappropriate plural markers as well as omission of plural 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 syntactic levels primarily focusing on plural markers. The presence of unit of analysis was noted and marked as '1' and absence or usage of inappropriate plural marker was noted and marked as '0'. The total number of each plural marker were tabulated

Results and Discussion

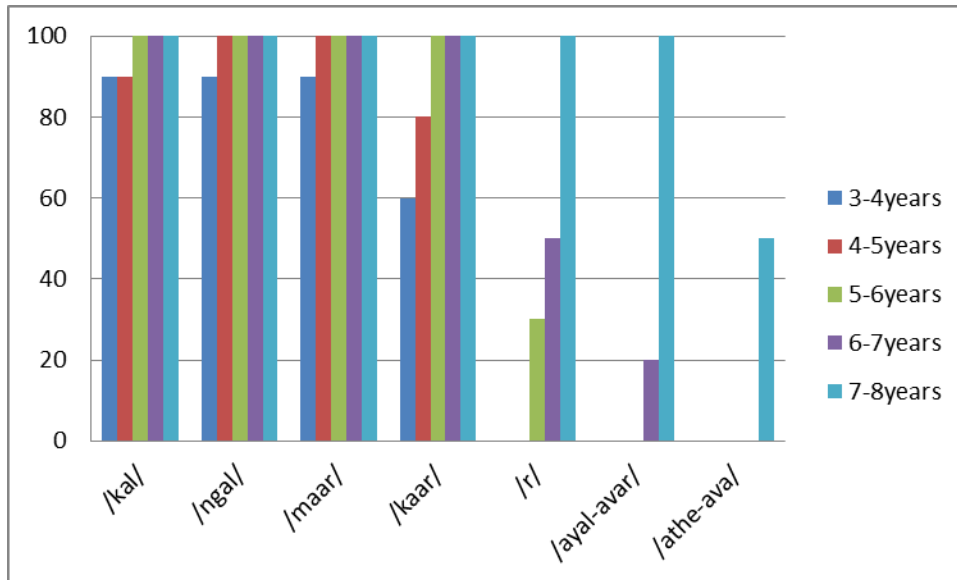


Fig 1: Acquisition of plural markers (in percentage) in typically developing Malayalam speaking children of age range 3-8years

Plural markers like /kal/, /ma:r/ etc. are regular markers while /aja:l/-/avar/ are irregular markers. Most of the regular plural markers showed 100% acquisition above the age of 5 years whereas irregular plurals were 100% acquired only by 7-8 years old children. Above 60% acquisition of regular markers were shown by all the age groups.

Summary and Conclusion

An agglutinative language like Malayalam is rich in morphological aspects in which identifying the morphological suffixes of verbs and nouns is a tough task.

The present study aimed at identifying the acquisition of plural 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 plural markers with increase in age of the children.

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 subject 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 Malayalam-speaking population.

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