

Case markers among Kannada speaking typical children

Dr. Satish Kumaraswamy, Rakshitha. S, Rakshitha Srihari

Abstract: Language is a system of phonological, semantic, and syntactic rules for communicative purposes that can be applied in an orderly manner, child learns and acquires language is a hierarchical process which develops from birth to several years of life. The rules through which we study the principles and processes of sentence construction is referred to as syntax, a component of language. The child's language adequacy can be determined by understanding the development of language and syntax. Morpho-syntactic operations require a comprehending and use of correct word order and organisation in phrases and sentences like PNG markers, tense markers, plural markers, case markers etc. The study highlights the need to carry out more research in this area for better understanding of language acquisition among these children in order to develop both assessment and intervention programmes. Presently, the lack of acquisition data has hindered the development of any standardized test in Kannada. Hence, the present study aims to explore Case Markers in Kannada speaking typically developing children with the objective of analysing the data among these children across 4 to 8 years of age. The results revealed that most of these markers were developed by 5 to 6 years of age.

Introduction

Language is the comprehension and/or use of a spoken, written and/or communication symbol system. As language is a complex and dynamic system of conversation symbols that is used in various modes for thought and communication. It is described by at least five components -phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. The function of language is informative, expressive, and directive (Subba Rao, 1992). Language plays an important role in child's development in order to effectively exchange information with other in a meaningful way.

The set of rules, principles, and processes that governs the structure of sentences in a given language, specifically word order refers to syntax. Syntax is the study of sentences and phrases, or how people put words into the right order so that they can communicate meaningfully. All languages have underlying rules of syntax, which, along with morphological rules, make up every language's grammar. It is a set of rules of constructing full sentences out of word and phrases. Every language has a different set of syntactic rules but all languages have a same form of syntax.

Development of syntax

Syntactic development is measured using MLU (mean length of utterance) which is basically the average length of a child's sentence; this increase as a child gets older. According to Gleason in stage 1, these primitive sentences mostly consist of nouns, verbs and adjectives with a lack of important grammatical elements. As children move through the five stages of syntactic development, their sentences grow in length. According to speech language pathologist Bowen, kids begin to learn grammatical elements in Stage II, usually between 28 and 36 months. Most toddlers acquire these elements in the same order, beginning with the present progressive -ing, then the prepositions in and on. Bowen writes that Stage III includes the acquisition of irregular past tense words, such as: "are" vs "is." This stage usually occurs between 36 * 42 months. By Stage IV - For example, a toddler will often say "goed" or "foots" before he says, "went" or "feet." But this shows understanding of the rules; it's another automatically learned phenomenon. Stage V - From 42 months on, children reach Stage V, which includes using contractions, such as: combining them with other verbs forming contractions with them. According to Bowen, kids have usually mastered all of these stages by 52 months and should be able to form four to five word sentences around age 4.

Case markers

Case marker is 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 functions performed by a noun or pronoun. It is usually a set of letters at the end of a word. In English we only have a few left: who- subjective case; whose – possessive case; whom- objective case. In this there are nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, ablative, instrumental, locative and sociative. These case markers add meaning to the word without changing to another.

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 morphosyntactic 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 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.

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 and 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).

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 and 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.

Shastri (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 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.

Need for the Study

Morpho-syntactical studies in the Indian context would aid in assessment and help in establishing the baseline to set goals for morphological intervention in children with disability. The lack of acquisition data has hinged the development of any standardized test in Kannada. The present study attempts to understand the case markers in Kannada speaking typical children.

Need for normative data in acquisition of grammar in Kannada language with help of SLP to baseline for assessment as well as rehabilitation.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to explore case markers in Kannada speaking typically developing children with the objective of analyzing the data among these children across various age level.

Methodology

Participants

20 typical children participated in the present study. All children were native speakers of Kannada studying in government schools in and around Dakshin Kannada.

Selection criteria

Children were from Kannada- medium schools within the age range of four to eight years. The children within four to eight years were preferred for the study because by four years a reasonable amount of language development occurs in a child that can be compared to adult language patterns. Thus, the mental age range of four to eight years needs largest attention for remediation of children with language disorders. Prior to the research, school authorities were explained about the purpose of the research and a written permission was obtained from them.

Inclusion Criteria

- Children between four to eight years of age who speak Kannada as their native language, selected by teachers, who best suited the criteria for recording of language samples.

Exclusion Criteria

- Children with a history/complaint of any speech and/or language deficits, history /complaint of any reading and/or writing problems with the history/complaint of acquired hearing loss with complaint of cognitive deficits such as poor memory, attention deficit, organizational and/or sequencing issues with a history of any transfer from more than one school, history of any shift in the medium of instruction and with a history of any academic failures. Post-selection children were divided into four subgroups, Group 1 (4-5 YEARS), Group 2 (5-6 YEARS), Group 3 (6-7 YEARS), and Group 4 (7-8 YEARS).

Language Data Collection

Natural conversational samples were audio recorded, during clinician-child interactions at the time of play. Each sample was recorded in a quiet corner room within the school premises, with limited auditory and visual distraction. The recordings were of 8-10 minutes targeting one child at a time. During the recording therapist gave minimal instructions and focused on eliciting maximum natural responses from the child based on the stimuli (pictures) presented. Various picture materials were used to elicit language responses from children. All the children interacted using the same stimuli material

Results and Discussion

The data obtained were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS-17 software. Statistical test used were krushkal Willis test. The result of the present study is presented below:

TABLE 1: Shows the performance in male and female children for Case markers

CASE MARKER S	AGE	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	IQR	Mannwhitney test p value	
	A (4-5 years)	Male	10	.00	.00	.00	(0-0)	1.000	NS
		Female	10	.00	.00	.00	(0-0)		
	B (5-6 years)	Male	10	.00	.00	.00	(0-0)	1.000	NS
		Female	10	.00	.00	.00	(0-0)		
	C (6-7 years)	Male	10	4.90	.32	5.00	(5-5)	.317	NS
		Female	10	5.00	.00	5.00	(5-5)		
	D (7-8 years)	Male	10	5.00	.00	5.00	(5-5)	1.000	NS
		Female	10	5.00	.00	5.00	(5-5)		

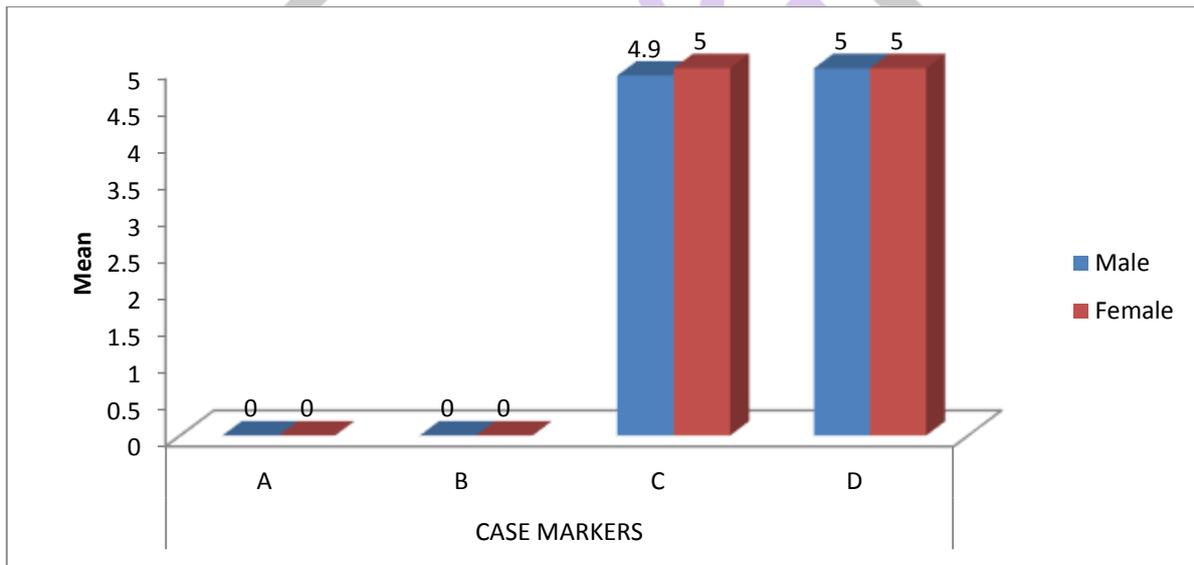


Fig 1: Performance across age for Case markers

As shown from table and figure it can be seen that male and female students of both age group of 4-5 years, 5-6 years did not use any of Case markers. Whereas male and female children in age group of 6-7 years, 7-8 years did perform better but statistically no significance was seen for either group of children (P=1.000).

Conclusion

The present study included subjects from middle class families as the data was collected in Government school set up in Dakshina Kannada. Hence there was no effect of the variables that affect spoken language such as urban v/s rural, illiterate v/s literate and cast hierarchy. The present study also correlates with western studies as in (Brown, 2003) who 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. In fact, the period of greatest acquisition is from 6-8 years. On summarizing syntactic development by about 4-5 years the development of syntax was completed in TDC. In the present study the results reveal that by 5-6 years of age the initiation of use of case markers is taking place in typically developing children and continues to develop till 6 years of age and mastery is acquired around 7-8years of age. This study helps in documenting normal development of syntax in typically developing children of age 4-8 years hence the present study helps in both assessment and intervention programmes in children with communication disorders.

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