

Tense Markers among Kannada speaking typical children

Rakshitha Srihari, Rakshitha S, Dr. Satish Kumarswamy (Guide)

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. Appropriate Morpho-syntactic operations require a comprehending and use of correct word order and organization 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 have better assessment and intervention programmes. Presently, the lack of acquisition data has hinged the development of any standardized test in Kannada. Hence, the present study aims to explore Tense Markers in Kannada speaking children in 4.8 years of age. The results revealed that most of tense markers were developed by 5 to 6 years of age.

Introduction

Language is a system of phonological, semantic, and syntactic rules which can be applied in an orderly manner for communicative purposes (Chomsky, 1965). 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 hold that

- Evolution of language is within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts.
- Language is a rule governed behavior described by at least five parameters phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.
- Interaction of biological, cognitive, psychosocial and environmental factors is determined for learning language and its use.
- Effective use of language for communication requires a broad understanding of human interaction including such associated factors as nonverbal cues, motivation and socio-cultural roles. (American Speech and Hearing Association, 1982)

Morpho-syntax is the study of grammatical categories or linguistic units that have both morphological and syntactic properties. Morpho-syntax includes the set of rules that govern linguistic units whose properties are definable by both morphological and syntactic criteria.

Tense marker is a category that expresses time reference. Tenses are usually manifested by the use of specific forms of verbs particularly in their conjunction patterns. Basic tenses found in many languages include Past, Present and Future. Some languages have only two distinct tenses such as Past and Non-Past, or Future and Non-Future. tenses in various languages are Present Tense, Present Perfect, Past Perfect, Future, Future Perfect etc. Individual tense forms can serve multiple functions.

Review of Literature

Language is defined as a code whereby ideas about the world are represented by a conservative system of signals for communication (Bloom and Lahey, 1974). Language set up with codes (set of symbols), rules (set of action) which combine to form words, phrases and sentences for the purpose of communication. The components of language are phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The system of sound of a particular language that deals mainly with production is phonology (Luck, 1991), the study of morphemes which are the smallest units of speech that carry meaning is morphology (Luck, 1991). The order of arrangement of words is syntax, this arrangement reveals significant rapport within and between the sentences. Most syntactic research has focused on the relation expressed at the sentence level.

Tense markers are an important module of syntax. According to Browns stages of language development tense development begins in stage 2 and continues well in the school age years. In fact, the period of greatest acquisition is from 4 to 7 years (Brown, 1973). Tense is a category that expresses time references basic tense found in many languages including the Past, Present and Future tense. Rutter and Buckley (1994) investigated the acquisition of grammar in children with Down syndrome, to look at the production of morphological rules and onset ages at which they are acquired in their language in particular and suggested that once the children with Down syndrome get going with the production of language they in fact show a similar pattern as typically developing children in the early acquisition of grammar.

Rice and Wexler (1996) evaluated as candidate clinical markers, a set of morphemes that mark tense. In English, this includes -s third person singular, -ed regular past, BE, and DO in children with specific language impairment (SLI). The findings were discussed in terms of alternative accounts of grammatical limitations of children with SLI and implication for clinical identification.

Paradis and Cargo (2000) examined the children's use of tense morphology, temporal adverbials, agreement morphology, and distributional contingencies associated with finiteness and the findings revealed that use of Morphosyntax by children with SLI and by L2 children's certain specific differences, although significant similarities were present. Both the children with SLI and the L2 children demonstrate optional infinitive effects in their language use.

Tyler, Davies, Anokhina, Longworth and Randall (2002) studied Dissociations in Processing Past Tense Morphology: Neuropathology and Behavioral Studies and results reveals that no fluent patients showed significant priming for the irregulars but no priming for the regular past tense (whereas controls show priming for both). In contrast, in a HSE patient for elicitation tasks significantly impaired performance for the irregulars was shown. These patterns of behavioral data and neuropathology suggest that

processing of the regular and irregular past tense is two separable but independent systems.

Ramsden, Botting and Fargher (2003) studied Psycholinguistic Markers for Specific Language Impairment (SLI). The results reveal that with sentence repetition (a previously unused marker), the markers vary in accuracy. This psycholinguistic marker shows high levels of sensitivity (90%), specificity (85%), and overall accuracy (80%), as well as despite having a history of SLI, allows to identifying the majority of children whose current language status falls in the normal range.

Hardly and Short (2005) studied the onset of tense marking in children at risk for SLI and results reveal that all measures of onset were highly correlated with the traditional measures; however, children's progress towards mastery of grammatical tense marking was best explained by the productivity of their tense marking systems. Finally, the onset measures imposing productivity requirements best differentiated children in the LA group from those in the AR-SLI group.

Paradis, Rice, Crago and Marquis (2008) reported the use and knowledge of tense marking morphemes in English by first language (L1), second language (L2) and specific language impairment (SLI) children, results reveal that compared with monolingual children the L2 children had a unique profile, which was better characterized by the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis. At the same time, results also reinforce the assumption underlying the (extended) Optional Infinite Profile that internal constraints on the acquisition of tense could be component of L1 development, with and without SLI.

Gau, Spencer and Tomblin (2013) investigated the development of tense marker (e.g., past tense -ed) in children with cochlear implants (CIs) over a 3-year span and the findings suggested that despite the perceptual and processing constraints, children who received CIs may learn tense marking albeit with a delayed pattern.

Shah and Friedman (2015) observed the production of verb tense in sentences is more severely impaired than other functional categories in persons with agrammatic aphasia. Results revealed compared to neutral (non infinite) verbs tensed verbs were more impaired, but no significant differences between past, present, and future tenses. Overall, tense accuracy was mediated by task, such that picture description task was the most challenging.

Subbarao (1995) aimed at obtaining descriptive language data in Kannada speaking intellectually disabled children and results revealed that the overall delay in language development there are differences among the MA matched normal and ID children. These differences are most easily noticeable in syntactic aspects as compared to phonological or semantic aspects. The tense markers present and past were used by a large number of subjects in both groups' future/habitual tense was mainly used by normal subjects.

George (2000) studied semantic and syntactic skill in 20 fluent Malayalam speaking LD children ranging in age from 6 to 15 years using Linguistic Profile Test. Results revealed that even though LD children have fluent speech they showed lag in both syntax and semantic scores than that of normal but as the age progresses LD scores also improved like normal.

Khansir (2008) analyzed the syntactic errors in English committed by 100 B. Com second year students in several colleges of University of Mysore, India. An English Grammar Test based on the textbooks of the studied colleges and including areas like auxiliary verbs, passive and tenses were developed and used by the researcher. The study revealed that the areas of highest to lowest percentage of errors made by the sample were tense (39), use of auxiliaries (33), and passive voice (28); and the major source of errors was learning strategies of all the learners.

Shasthry (2010) reported a study on acquisition of tense markers in 5- to 8-year-old Kundapura Kannada speaking typically developing children from her study of 30 children she reported that the 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 where simplifications of CVs were significant followed by vowel shortening, syntactic deviation and semantic deviations. She concluded that the result of study is in agreement with Subbarao (1995) who reported the usage of present tense markers were maximum in 4 to 6 years old normally developing children.

Madappa (2015) investigated the use of past tense markers, discourse markers and pronoun use in English L2 children using narrative discourse the study proves that there exists an order of acquisition in children and this is true across languages, irrespective of what the L1 is. The fact that 'and' being the only prominent discourse marker being used shows that the learner is not equipped with using discourse markers. These findings thus support the fundamental assumptions made by both the paradigms under study and are consistent with prior research in the area.

Murali and Kumaraswamy (2015) studied acquisition of tense markers in typically developing Malayalam speaking children and results indicated that highly significant scores among the tense markers across the age groups. The occurrence of simple future tense was less frequent when compared to other tense markers and also found that as the age increases the ability to use correct tense forms has been improved.

Common Present Tense Marker

The common present tense marker in Kannada is /-tt-/, and it occurs between the verb stem and the PNG marker.

/ho:g/ - 'go' + /-tt-/ 'present' + /i:ni/ '1st p. sing' - /ho:gti:ni/ 'I go'.

/tago/ - 'take (for oneself)' + /-tt-+i:ni/

'1st p. sing' - /tagoti:ni/ 'I take (for myself)'

The common past tense form is /-id/, Examples:

/ma:d/ -‘make,do’ -/ma:did-madde/ -‘done’

/malag/ -‘sleep’ -/malagid/ -‘slept’

There are *exceptions* in forming past tense, some examples are

/tinn/ -‘eat’ -/tind/ -‘ate’

/bi:l/ -‘fall’ -/bidd/ -‘fell’

/so:l/ -‘lose’ -/so:t/ -‘lost’

/koll/ -‘kill’ -/kond/ -‘killed’

/sa:y/ -‘die’ -/satt/ -‘died’

/baa/ -‘come’ -/band/ -‘came’

/hor/ -‘carry’ -/hot/ -‘carried’

/bid/ -‘leave’ -/bitt/ -‘left’

/bari/ -‘write’ -/bard/ -‘wrote’

Generally *regular future tense markers* are not found. The verb /-iru/ is used as future/habitual tense marker. The future/habitual may mean ‘will be’ or ‘be (always)’. Example: /na:nuidi:niirti:ni/

1st sg pr present future/habitual

Sometimes the contingent form is used to indicate ‘might (do something)’. Example:

/na:nubande:nu/ ‘I might come/

/avanubanda:nu/ ‘he might come’

Need for the Study

Morpho-syntactic 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 the development of any standardized test in Kannada. The present study attempts to understand the tense markers in Kannada speaking typical developing children.

Aim of Study

The study aims to explore tense markers in Kannada speaking children with the objective of analyzing the data of among these children across various age levels.

Methodology

Participants

20 typical children participated in the study and the participants were selected from in and around Dakshina Kannada. All the participants were native speakers of Kannada language.

Selection Criteria

Typical Children

Typical children recruited 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 conduction of 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, a history /complaint of any reading and/or writing problems who had any history/complaint of acquired hearing-loss, complaints of cognitive deficits such as poor memory, attention deficit, organizational and/or sequencing issues a history of any transfer from more than one school with a history of any shift in the medium of instruction with a history of any academic failures. Post-selection, these 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 a minimum 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 subjects 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 of male and female children for Tense markers

TENSE MARKERS	AGE	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	IQR	Mannwhitney test p value	
	A (4-5 years)	Male	10	1.00	.00	1.00	(1-1)	1.000	NS
		Female	10	1.00	.00	1.00	(1-1)		
	B(5-6 years)	Male	10	5.00	.00	5.00	(5-5)	1.000	NS
		Female	10	5.00	.00	5.00	(5-5)		
	C(6-7 years)	Male	10	5.00	.00	5.00	(5-5)	1.000	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)		

As shown in table: 1, performance of male group A (4-5years) for Tense markers (M=1.00, SD= .00) and performance of male group B (5-6 years), C (6-7 years) and D (7-8 years) for Tense markers

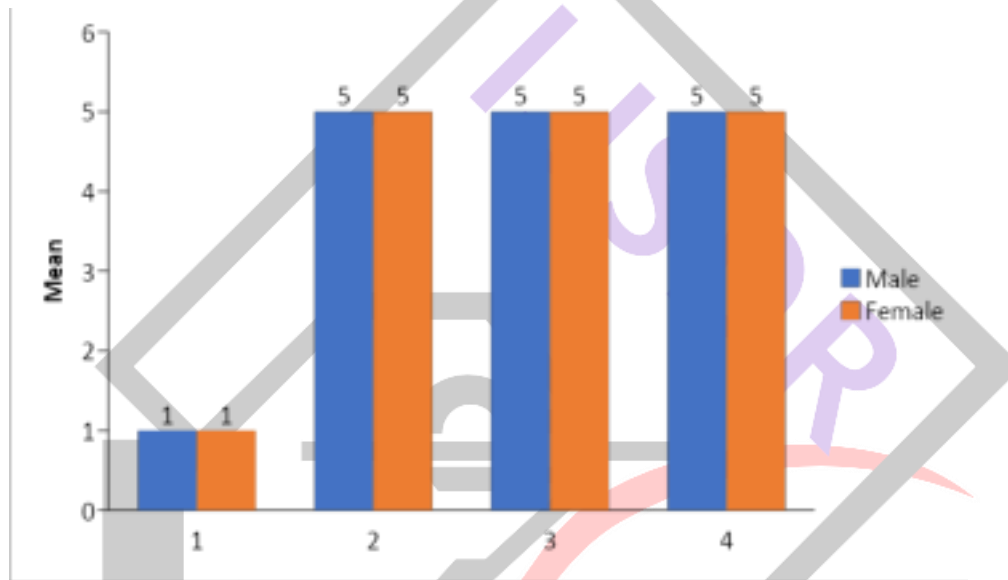


Fig1: Performance across age for Tense markers

As shown from table and figure it can be seen that male and female students of age group of 4-5 years performed poorly and did not use any of Tense markers. Whereas male and female children of age group 5-6 years, 6-7 years, 7-8 years have performed better statistically, no significance was seen for the group (P=0.000)

Conclusion

The present study included subjects from middle class families. 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, 1973) who reported tense development begins in stage 2 and continues to develop in the school age years. In fact, the period of greatest acquisition is from 4-7 years. On summarizing syntactic development (Crystal et al., 1989) observed 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 tense markers is taking place in typically developing children and continues to develop till 7 years of age and mastery is acquired around 8 years 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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