

The Aspects of Acquisition of Kannada by 2 + year old Children*

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Studies regarding child's language acquisition in Indian languages are scanty. The present study investigated the speech of four Kannada speaking children, two boys and two girls, in the age range of 2 ; 3.5 to 2 ; 11.5. Their socio-economic status and native language were the same.

The utterances of the children were recorded in four stages for three children and in three stages for one child with an interval of approximately five weeks between each stage. The elicitation and imitation techniques as well as spontaneous speech were resorted to.

The data collected was transcribed in the phonetic script. Equivalent adult forms were recorded in Kannada script. The transcribed data was analysed :

- (1) To set up phonemes and to establish phonetic and phonemic distribution ;
- (2) To identify clusters ;
- (3) To identify major sentence patterns and grammatical categories ; and
- (4) To identify types of transformation and major characteristics of discourse.

The analysis was aimed at identifying hierarchy and the order in which the above

linguistic units were acquired by the children. The analysis compared the children's speech with adult's speech wherever necessary.

The following general hierarchies may be established for the speech of the four children:

Phonological Hierarchies

- (1) The distinction between voiced and voiceless feature is acquired earlier than the distinction between aspirated and unaspirated feature. (The voiced and voiceless feature was observed at the commencement of study and aspirated and unaspirated feature was not observed even at the time of the completion of study.)
- (2) The distinction between short and long vowels is acquired and stabilized in all the children at the time of the commencement of study.
- (3) Among the consonants, the stop consonants are acquired more fully than sibilants, trills and laterals.
- (4) Among the nasals, the bilabial and the alveolar nasals are acquired earlier than other nasals. (The alveolar nasal was not acquired till the completion of study.)

* Master's Dissertation, University of Mysore, 1976.

(5) Among the sibilants, the alveolar and palatal sibilants are acquired earlier than the retroflex sibilants. (The retroflex sibilant was not acquired till the completion of study.)

(6) In general, the retroflex sounds interchange very often with the alveolar counterparts.

(7) The pronunciation of trill poses difficulty.

(8) Identical and homorganic clusters are acquired earlier than the non-identical clusters. (In the two children of the younger age group at the commencement of study only the identical clusters and the homorganic ones were present. In the later stages, there was increase in the number of non-identical clusters used. The older age group children presented few number of non-identical clusters at the commencement of study and there was progressive increase in the number of non-identical clusters used in the later stages.)

(9) The children substitute identical clusters for the non-identical clusters of the adult speech. Sometimes, a single sound is substituted for the non-identical clusters.

(10) Even at the age of completion of the study the children were found to be in the process of acquiring phonemic contrast, *i.e.*, the phonology does not completely match the adult phonology.

Grammatical Hierarchies

(1) The root form of the word is acquired earlier than the acquisition of word with affixes.

(2) The children acquire the basic types of sentence patterns namely, nominal and verbal very early. (These sentence types were present at the commencement of study.)

(3) The children also acquire the distinction between noun and verb very early. (The distinction was present at the time of the commencement of study.)

(4) Within the nouns, the children acquire the concrete nouns early. (Abstract nouns did not appear even at the time of the completion of study).

(5) Among the pronouns, first person singular, second person singular and third person neuter singular are acquired earlier than the other types of pronouns.

(6) Among the verbs, the transitive and intransitive ones are acquired earlier than the reflexive and causative ones. (Transitive and intransitive verb distinction was present at the time of the commencement of study. Causative verb never appeared till the completion of study. However, reflexive verbs appeared in the later stages of recording in the children of the younger age group.)

(7) Single verb roots are acquired earlier than the compound verb roots.

(8) Present and past tense forms are acquired earlier than the future tense forms. It appears that the present tense forms might be occurring earlier than the past tense forms.

(9) Generally, the acquisition of past tense participles and the participle compound verbs proceed side by side.

- (10) Inflection of the verbs for number and gender are achieved a little later after the children have just started using the affixes. The verbs are inflected for singular first person and imperatives earlier than the verbs inflected for singular second person and plural third person. Among the gender distinctions, the neuter gender is distinguished from masculine and feminine first. Later, the children distinguish between masculine and feminine genders.
- (11) First the expression of case relations is done without using explicit case markers.
- (12) No hierarchy of emergence of the explicit case markers could be established.
- (13) Coordinate constructions are not acquired till the completion of study.
- (14) A maximum of two modifiers are used for a head noun at the stage of the completion of study.
- (15) The children face difficulty in the construction of discourses. The discourses consist of a maximum of three sentences in the younger age group
- (16) Negative transformations employing mere addition of "ll", "ill" and "be : d" are acquired earlier than the other types of negative transformations.
- (17) Generally speaking, negative transformations are acquired earlier than the other types of transformations.
- (18) Embedding transformation is acquired in the process of constructing discourses.
- (19) The status of the transpose transformation and pronominalization are of a doubtful nature.
- (20) The children seem to acquire many complex forms involving complex transformational steps through imitation at the first instance. The acquisition of the systematic processes comes later.
- (21) The above statement holds good also for the use of certain phonological elements.
- (22) The children's difficulty in composing and using longer utterances is related not only to their inadequate acquisition of grammar but also to that of phonology.
- (23) No difference was found between the sexes either in the acquisition of phonology or in the acquisition of grammar.
- (24) In general, there is a regularity and order in the acquisition of phonological, grammatical and transformational characteristics among all the children. This regularity may be broadly the same for all the children, although each child may have its own variations within the overall regular framework.

Recommendations for Further Study

- (1) A longitudinal study from the babbling stage onwards would contribute very useful data. More frequent observations in the collection of data and more detailed analysis than were used in this study may be useful in establishing the hierarchies of categories of different aspects of language.

- (2) Tests should be constructed to study the acquisition of comprehension of different aspects of language.
- (3) The acquisition studies should be carried out in other Indian languages.
- (4) Acquisition studies on children with deviant speech and language beha-

viours should be made and they may be compared with that of normals. These would be of clinical importance.

- (5) Similar studies on bilingual children may be fruitfully undertaken in India.