SOME ASPRCTS OF SYNTACTIC DEVELOPMENT IN MARATHI SPEK-
ING CHILDREN AGED 2 1/2 - 3 YEARS—A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Every human child acquires the language of his community, provided he is given a fighting chance by heredity and environment.

Language is central to all communities of human beings, ' essential for the regulation of every community the instruction of its young . . . . . the identification of its members ' (Brown and Miller, 1980),

Language is complex and involves highly abstract organizational principles, but child masters a linguistic system, that is for practical purposes identical to the one employed by those around him in a few years.

At the age of around 18 months, children begin to form simple two and three word sentences and at four years, they are able to produce sentences of almost every' conceivable syntactic type '.   Language thus is almost completely acquired in approximately 30 months.

What underlies this acquisition is not known:

Three major approaches to acquisition can be identified (McLaughlin, 1978).

1. Empiricist or behaviourist approach which believes language is learned.
2. Transformational generative grammarian approach which believes language is innate and the child acquires language based on language universals through testing of hypotheses.
3. Process approach which is based on cognition, and attempts to explain how language is processed cognitively and manifested behaviourally.

The question ' How is language acquired ' is best answered if we know what is acquired at each age.   In the words of Chomsky (1959), ' There is little point in speculating about the process of acquisition without a much better understanding of what is acquired.'

This study attempted to describe some syntactic patterns acquired by Marathi speaking children.

Four normal children, were subjects for this study.   All four children came from middle-class families.   Of the four children, three were from Bangalore and one from Mysore. The age range of the children was 2 1/2 to 3 2/12 years.

Two children, (one boy and one girl) were 2 1/2 years of age and other two were 3 years old.

Approximately, a three hour duration of speech sample was collected from each child in 3 to 4 consecutive days.

The investigator used picture books, toys and crayons and the child's own favourite play materials to elicit speech. Verbal and tangible reinforcers were also used.

Speech was elicited informally with the following techniques, to elicit different aspects of speech from the children: (1) interview, (2) description, (3) games, (4) story telling and (5) spontaneous speech with the child's family members. The speech samples obtained were transcribed in broad phonetic transcription. The data were treated as a whole and the sentences produced by the children were classified into four main types: (1) Declarative, (2) Interrogative, (3) Negative and (4) Imperative. Coordinated and pronominalized sentences were also studied.

Analysis of the data was done using the transformational —generative grammar approach. With this approach it is possible to describe sequentially.

(a) The underlying structure of each sentence;

(b) The structural changes necessary to derive other sentences from this basic sentence type and

(c) The morphological changes which occur because of the previous sequences, (Menyuk, 1964).

The child's grammar can thus be described as a structural whole.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented under the following heads:

1. Sentence structure and stylistic variations and developmental order of the four aspects of syntax.

2. Deviant sentences and comparison to adult forms.

1. *Sentence structure and stylistic variations and developmental order:*

A sentence is a set of words occurring in a linear sequence but hierarchically structured. It is composed of two major constituents NP (Noun Phrase) and PDP (Predicate Phrase).

$$S \longrightarrow NP \quad + \quad PDP$$

The phrase structure rules that derive various types of sentences may be represented as follows:

$$S \texttt{------->} \{ \text{ Imp Q } \} + \text{(Neg)} + NP + PDP$$

From this basic rule, rules to derive different sentence types can be obtained
Declarative Sentence:

S⎯⎯⎯⟶NP+PDP.

E.g. (1) mi ka:g?d deto

'I' 'paper' 'give' (mas)

I give paper.

Mi is the NP and ka: g?d deto the PDP.

NP⎯⎯⎯⟶ $\begin{Bmatrix} (Det) \\ Pr\,onoun \end{Bmatrix} N$

Adj⎯⎯⟶ (Adj$_n$) + (Adj Des)

Demonstrative : E.g.Hi (This), ti (that)

Gentitive : E.g. ma:$3^h a$: (my)

Adjective: Adj$_N$ (Aggregate) e.g. $dog^h \partial.$ (both)

Adj$_{Des}$ e.g $\breve{c}^h o\underset{.}{t}\partial$ (small)

Noun: Nouns in children's speech can be classified into three main categories of gender- masculine (m), feminine (f) and neuter (n): The children used very few abstract nouns. The 2½ year old children did not use any abstract noun except $b^h uk$ (hunger).

Pronoun: The following branching model has been adapted from Rangan (1972) to illustrate pronouns used by children.
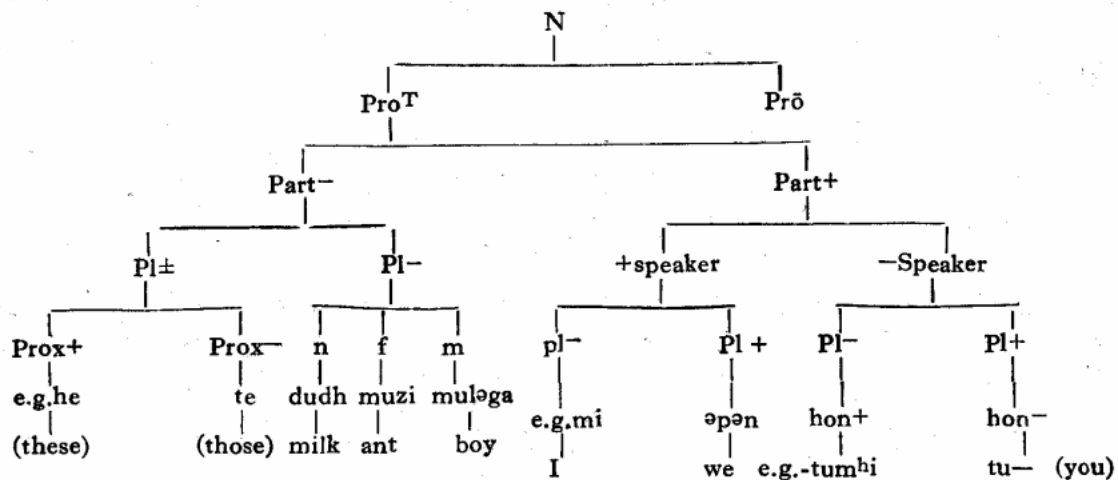
As can be seen, only one honorific form is used and plural pronouns are not differentiated for gender. The single honorific form was used by 3-year old children only.

Predikat *Phrase:* The Constituents of the PDP? may be represented follows:

PDP—>(AdVT) + (AdVP) ± VP+Aux

Adverbs: AdVT—a:ta:c 'now'

    (time)

    AdVP—Eg. *tit^{h}e the* 'there'

    (Place)

    AdVm

    (manner) E. g. *h ?luc* 'slowly'

VP—>NP+PP+Advm+V

PP can belong to these categories—Nominative, Accusative, Dative, Bene- factive,

Ablative, Instrumental, Possessive, Locative.

Auxiliary—verbs e.g., a :he.

   Stylistic variations: Subject NP may be deleted, transposed at the end of the sentence, N + PP may be repeated at the end of the sentence after a pause.

Elliptical sentences are used.

   Negation: The negative sentence may be represented as shown:

S --------→Neg+NP+PDP

Negative particles *na:hi* 'no' and *n?ko* 'dont want' are used. Negative words formed with prefix (?) are not used, nor is negative particles *(n?ye)* 'should not' be used. Only one 3 years old child used a negative word with prefix no. Imperative negative sentences are used.

   Interrogation: The interrogative sentence is indicated by the presence of the Q element in the deep structure of the sentence.

S———>Q+NP+PDP

Interrogative sentences in the children's sample are of the following types.

(1) yes/no (2) tag and (3) wh- type.

Yes/no questions: are obtained by changing the intonation and using habitual emphasis future marker/-u/, or using the phrase *ho.ka:* (yes what) 'is it' before the sentence.

   Tag questions: may be represented as follows:

S———>Q + Neg+NP+PDP

Tag questions are formed by using tags /na :/no? or what and *ho ki na:hi* yes or no.

Wh- questions: ko ' who', *ka.y* ' what ', *ku he* ' where ' and *k se* ' how ' are used by all children.   The 3-year old children use additionally *ku hl* ' which ', *ko a:ca*'whose' *ka:* 'why',

Imperative sentences'. Indicate commands or requests rule for imperative sentences may be rewritten as shown.

S——>Imp+NP+PDP

The imperative sentences are of the following types-verb root, Subject + Verb, Noun+Verb, Verbal Noun, Negative elliptical.

Coordination: is the conjoining of two or more sentences with the help of coordinations.   The children used the following coordinators.

Coordinate conjunctions: *i* ' and ' *mg* ' then ' *ankhi* and ' more'.

Adversative conjunctions were used more often by the older children, *tart* ' even then' and *mha un* ' therefore '.

Disjunctive conjunction—*ki* (or) was used only by three-year old children to conjoin words.

Pronominalization: is the process of substituting a pronoun for a NP in sentences where an antecedent NP is a co-referential of the NP.   Pronominalization across sentences seen in the speech samples of all children, but only the three year-old children used it within the sentence.

They used both forward and backward pronominalization.   Reflexivization was not found. It is probable that it has not been acquired. Embedded sentences were few.

2. *Deviant sentences and comparison to adult forms*

(a) The children did not maintain the concord between the N and pronoun and verb. The acquisition of gender is a slow process and may be adversely affected by Marathi baby talk which uses feminine ending and concord for a boy's name and vice versa (Kelkar, 1964).

(b) Personal reference pronouns are not completely acquired as yet.   The children may say

hi d r s n ʒi kaset a:he

' This ' darshan's cassette 'is'

This is Darshan's cassette instead of *This is my cassette.*   This is not found in adult speech.

(c) Irregular verbs are wrongly inflected, *kr-'to* do' is an irregular verb and the past is *kel* not *krle* which is the form used by the children.   It appears that the rule for past has been generalized.

(d) Numerals are used to indicate ' many' rather than the actual quantity. The 2½ year-old children tended to use numerals greater than one for many, and the 3 year-old children used ' ten' to indicate many.

(e) PP markers are incorrectly used sometimes. Again, it appears that the children are trying out rules.

E.g.   it^{h}e   pota:la: duk$^{h/}$
' Here ' ' to stomach ' ' pained'

Literally, 'it pained to my stomach' when what was meant was ' There is a pain in my stomach '.   It is possible the child treats *duk^{h}h* (pained) and *la:gl* ' hurt' as the same semantically in which case the PP used is right or the stomach is treated as an independent object, not a part of him or any body.   Sometimes the PP marker may be shifted from subject to object.

E.g.—pilluca ma:kd hot
' Young ones ' ' monkey' ' was '

There was the young one's monkey.   What should have been said was ma: kda :c pillu hot

'Monkey's ' young one''was'
There was the monkey's young one.
This appears to be an idiosyncratic deviancy.

(f) Adjectives and emphasis markers are incorrectly used.   The use of emphasis markers t c for verbs as well as reduplication was generalized.
E.g.—hi *ga:di tc* daS z^{h}a:li
'This' 'car' 'only' 'dash' 'Happened'
This car only dashed.
tc is. used.with verbs and has been used with nouns.
mi tula: sodun sodun gele
I you (to) ''left' ' left' ' went'
I left you and went.   .
sodun is not reduplicated in adult speech.

(g) Auxiliary inversion in negative sentence was not always present.   The NP occurs before the auxiliary generally in adult speech.

(h) The children had not acquired the form *kaSa:ni* with what, but used *ka:yini* ' what by' instead, a form not used by adults.

Thus, it appears that the basic sentence structure is similar to adult structure. The children tended to speak in short phrases, punctuated by pauses and frequent corrections of previous phrases.

The children do not use many abstract nouns or honorific forms as to the adults.   They do use single plural pronouns, undifferentiated for gender, but differentiated for proximality.

Post-position markers and emphasis markers are frequently misused, and numerals are used differently.

Negation: The negative particle *nye'* should not' *and rfla:ge* not wanted was not used by children.

Interrogation: *kd^{h}ilkw^{h}a* 'when' k*Sa:ni* 'with what',

kSa:la 'why for ' were not used by the children at all.

kiti ' how many' and k*s* ' how ' were infrequently used.

Imperative sentences of the form pn k r a w ,

You (hon) must do.

.   You must do.

were not used at all.

Coordination: Disjunctive coordinators were used only to conjoin words. The conjunction *kiwhra* 'or' was not used either. The children have not acquired the role of inserting *ni* ' and ' just before the last NP in a sentence with more than two NPs.

Pronominalization within a sentence was seen only in three year-old children. Reflexivization was not observed at all in the speech samples.

Embedded sentences were seen.

The sentence structure of the 3 year-old children is more similar to adult sentence structure. The 2½ year-old children are yet to acquire certain rules. Both groups have yet to acquire certain rules. The difference in the sentence structure between the two groups in spite of 6-8 months difference indicates the high speed of acquisition.

Further research on a larger scale is needed.

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