

Some Aspects of Syntax of 5-6 Year Old Children : A Descriptive Study in Kannada*

PREMA, K. S.

An attempt was made in this study to describe some of the syntactic patterns of 5-6 year old children. Four children were selected for the study in the age range of 5-6 years. All the children were from Brahmin families, with Kannada as their native language and they were from "middle-class" group.

Speech sample was collected from each child for three successive days for about one hour every day. Technique of spontaneous speech combined with story narration was the main method used. Elicitation technique was used wherever Investigator found it necessary. The obtained speech sample was transcribed using broad phonetic script on the same day including some of the semantic clues.

The speech samples of all the four children were combined. The sentences of children were classified into the four basic types—declarative, negative, interrogative and imperative—and also into co-ordinated and pronominalized types.

The results were analysed on the following lines :

I. Structure of different types of sentences used by children.

* Master's Dissertation, University of Mysore, 1979.

II. Developmental order among the four syntactic aspects in the age range 5 : 0, 5 : 5 and 6 : 0.

III. Characteristics of deviant utterances.

IV. Some aspects of syntax were compared with adult forms.

The following inferences can be drawn from the present study of 5-6 year old children :

- (1) The structure of basic sentences resemble that of adult syntax.
- (2) (a) The complexities of PAP are present in children's speech.
(b) NP of children is simplified.
- (3) Free negative markers like *alla*, *illa*, *beda* : are found in children's speech but negative suffixes that occur with modal auxiliaries and other main verbs are not yet acquired.
- (4) Comprehension of negative suffixes is not developed but when the same meaning is interpreted in simplified manner children comprehend them.
- (5) Transformational rules to derive negative sentences are still in the process of acquisition.

- (6) All the basic interrogative markers in yes/no and Wh-type questions are found in children's speech.
- (7) Interrogative words with case suffixes in Wh-type questions are not found as in adults' speech. Interrogative words are simple without declining for cases.
- (8) Transformational rules to derive interrogative sentences of yes/no, and Wh-type are acquired by 5-6 years.
- (9) Tag questions were not observed in the obtained data. Presence of tag questions is in a doubtful state because representative data were not obtained for interrogative aspect of syntax.
- (10) All the WP and VP conjunctions are not acquired by 5-6 year old children.
- (11) [*matte* and *pause*] are the NP conjunctions used by these children.
- (12) [*-a*, *o* and *athava*] as NP conjunctions are not used by these children.
- (13) [*-a*,] is used as VP conjunction.
- (14) [*a:dare*] as conjunction is not used by these children.
- (15) [*a:mele*] which is an adv_i is used as NP conjunction (which is, of course, used by adults also).
- (16) Operations like identical verb deletion, etc., to derive co-ordinated sentences are not always used by these children. Instead of conjoining, the simple declarative sentences are uttered sometimes.
- (17) Rules to derive co-ordinated sentences are still in the process of acquisition.
- (18) Pronominalized sentences are used by children of 5-6 year old. But, the frequency of usage varies widely from child to child.
- (19) Both forward and backward pronominalizations are used by children.
- (20) Pronouns were used to indicate both antecedent and precedent NPs in pronominalized sentences as in adults.
- (21) Gender and number markers are erred sometimes indicating their instability in the speech of the children.
- (22) Causative suffix is not used properly by these children. Sometimes, the causative suffix is used to refer to object-NP thus producing an ungrammatical sentence.
- (23) Acquisition of articulatory process is not complete by 6 years. [Supports Tasneem Banu's (1977) study.]
- (24) No developmental order among the four syntactic aspects was noticed in the age range 5 : 0, 5 : 5 and 6 : 0.
- (25) No obvious sex difference in the ability to use the four syntactic aspects was noticed.

Implications of the Study

- (1) This kind of descriptive study helps to understand better the language used by normal children.
- (2) Knowledge of normal development of language processes helps in the identification and proper diagnosis of linguistically retarded children.
- (3) Such descriptions of language used by normal children helps in planning

therapy for deviant children of equivalent ages.

- (4) Knowledge of transformational rules used by normal children may be adopted in therapy sessions for teaching different types of sentences in simplified way.
- (5) Understanding of normal development of language is important in understanding regression and recovery processes of language in aphasic patients.
- (6) Evaluation of syntactic abilities of dyslexic children and comparison to normal development helps in early identification of dyslexic children which may not be possible by reading tests because, reading tests have to be given only for school-aged children. Early identification through syntactic abilities helps in taking up early remedial measures.

Recommendations for Further Study

- (1) A longitudinal study from one year onwards regarding all the aspects of

development of syntax would be very helpful for speech pathologists.

- (2) Such studies should be undertaken in different Indian languages to help plan therapy for children from different linguistic background.
- (3) Comparison of syntactic development in normal and different linguistically deviant children would be helpful for evaluation and diagnostic purposes.
- (4) A test may be constructed in Kannada to evaluate syntactic development of children.
- (5) The usefulness of syntactic tests in early identification of dyslexic children may be investigated.
- (6) A comparison can be made between the structure of language used (especially the mother-tongue) in the text-books of I standard and the structure acquired by the children around 5 years. This will enable one to understand the gap (if present) between the school language and the language of children.