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Comparison of Acquisition of Tense Markers in Oral and Written Language in Bilingual Children

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Abstract: ***Tense acquisition plays a crucial role in the language development of children. Tense refers to the grammatical expression of time in a sentence, which can be in the past, present, or future. Children begin to learn about tenses from a very young age and gradually acquire the ability to use them accurately as they develop their language skills. The present study aims to describe the comparison of the acquisition of tense markers in the oral and written language of 8 to 12-year-old Malayalam-English bilingual children. The study involves 20 typically developing children, studying in regular schools with English as the medium of instruction. Two tasks were selected, which included oral and written picture descriptions and narration. The results revealed that, in 8 to 10-year-old children, the acquisition of the simple present tense for both oral and written tasks in Malayalam and English was non significant and the acquisition of the simple past tense for both tasks in Malayalam and English was significant. However, the acquisition of the simple future tense in oral tasks for both languages was significant, while the written performance for future tense acquisition in both languages was non significant. For children aged 11 to 13 years, the acquisition of the simple present tense for oral and written tasks in Malayalam and English was inconclusive and the acquisition of the simple past tense for oral and written tasks in both Malayalam and English was non significant. The acquisition of the future tense for oral tasks was significant whereas for written tasks, it was inconclusive in both languages.***
Keywords: Tense acquisition, bilingual children.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a complex process that involves the gradual mastery of various linguistic components, including tense markers. Understanding how children acquire tense markers in both oral and written language is crucial for evaluating their language development. Tense markers are linguistic devices that indicate the time of an event or action within a sentence. They help to establish the temporal context of a message, allowing effective communication. In Malayalam and English, tense markers are manifested through verb inflections, auxiliary verbs, or other grammatical elements.

Cultural influence also plays a role in the acquisition of tense markers. Children growing up in bilingual environments may experience code-switching, where they alternate between Malayalam and English within a single conversation. This exposure to multiple languages can influence their understanding and usage of tense markers in both oral and written contexts.

Simultaneous bilingual individuals will achieve fluency in both languages when they receive continuous exposure and multiple meaningful chances to develop each linguistic system. Many bilingual individuals initially have consistent exposure to only one language (L1) from birth, with the learning of the second language (L2) beginning later in childhood. For these early sequential bilinguals, consistent exposure to the L2 language occurs primarily through immersion in an educational setting or increased interactions within the broader community.

Language diversity plays a major in influencing the content, instructional method, and outcomes of schooling. The child needs to learn the language when they begin pre schooling, as they grow into higher grades, they need to learn more aspects of language functions like variety of discourse, abstract vocabulary, and complex syntax.

Syntax refers to the study of rules, which govern word combination in language. Rules describing acceptable word combinations are called syntactic rules (Grundy 1995). Syntax usually does not begin until vocabulary size reaches 50 words, before 10 to 12 years, children do not master some syntactic rules. Syntax acquisition in later years is less rapid and dramatic than in early development.

Morphosyntax is the study of grammatical categories or linguistic units that have both morphological and syntactical properties. It is a set of rules that govern linguistic units, its properties are definable by both morphological and syntactic criteria. Morpho syntax includes plural markers, case markers, and PNG markers. This study mainly focuses on tense markers and their acquisition.

Tense markers are linguistic devices that convey temporal information within a sentence, indicating the time of an event or action. In the context of Malayalam and English, tense markers can be expressed through verb inflections, auxiliary verbs, or other grammatical elements. Basic tenses found in many languages are past, present, and future.

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Communication is a key element by which individuals exchange ideas. It relies not only on understanding the literal meaning of words used in speech or writing but also on comprehending the intended message conveyed by the speaker. Communication can take various forms, including oral or written expression.

Oral communication involves conveying ideas, thoughts, and information via spoken language. Oral language consists of phonology, grammar, morphology, vocabulary, discourse, and pragmatics. Acquisition of oral language is mainly through exposure to spoken language within their social environment such as children tend to pick up tense markers by imitating and practicing verbal interactions. Acquisition often occurs in a communicative context where immediate feedback and clarification can be obtained.

In written communication information is exchanged using written symbols such as words and sentence. Written language acquisition often takes place in a more structured setting, such as classrooms, where explicit instruction and guided practice are prevalent. Tense markers in written language require a deeper understanding of grammatical structures and rules. Its acquisition in written language poses a greater challenge compared to oral language. Written language demands accuracy in the use of tense markers due to the absence of contextual cues that oral language provides. Written texts require a more sophisticated understanding of verb tenses and their appropriate usage, leading to a higher level of grammatical accuracy.

Guo, Spencer, and Tombin (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the acquisition of tense markers in English-speaking children with cochlear implants. The study spanned three years and involved children who had received cochlear implants approximately 30 months before participating in the research. The participants were divided into controlled groups, comprising typically developing children aged 3, 4, and 5 years old. The findings revealed that children with cochlear implants demonstrated significantly lower accuracy in tense marking compared to their typically developing peers.

Santhana et al 2015 investigated the acquisition of tense markers in typically developing 4-7 year old Malayalam speaking children by describing the types and tense markers and comparing the presence of tense markers across the age groups. Thirty normal school-going children were grouped according to age basis and the result revealed highly significant scores among tense markers across age groups. The children in the older group performed well compared to the younger group in all tense markers. In the current study it has been found that as the age increased, the ability to use correct tense forms has been improved.

Dereena and Kumaraswamy 2016 studied the comparison in acquisition of tense markers in oral and written language of children among 4th to 6th grade Kannada-English bilingual children. They found that the oral language performance is similar between Kannada and English across all three tense markers in 4th grade. The 6th grade children use more English language when compared to Kannada language for simple present, past, and future tense.

II. NEED OF THE STUDY

In India, English is often learned as a second language in schools through formal education whereas the native language is acquired in normal communicative content. Currently, most parents from urban and rural areas prefer their children schooling in English medium, rather than their native language. In some children, English language proficiency may not be adequate to nurture outside the classroom. In these situations, sometimes children may identify with language impairment. This study will help SLP understand the acquisition of tense markers in both Malayalam and English language. The present study helps in understanding the development of tense markers in typically developing children.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Aim

The present study aims to describe the comparison of the acquisition of tense markers in oral and written language in 8 -12 year old Malayalam -English bilingual children.

B. Objectives

To compare the acquisition of tense markers in oral and written language performance in L1 and L2 (Malayalam and English)

C. Participants

The present study involves 20 typically developing children, studying in regular school with English as the medium of instruction. Based on the chronological age the children were further divided into two groups. All the groups consisted of ten equal number of participants.

1) Subject selection criteria

a) Malayalam -English bilingual children

b) Regular school going children aged 8 to 12 years.

2) Exclusion criteria
a) History of speech, language, or hearing problems
b) Neurological deficits

D. Stimulus

Two tasks were selected which include oral and written picture description and narration. Picture description task contains 10 sets of picture cards for each of the simple present, simple past, and simple future tenses. The narration task involves telling a story. In the oral task, students were instructed to describe a selected picture, while in the written task, they were required to write about a provided picture.

E. Procedure

The data was gathered in a quiet and well illuminated room, with one-on-one interaction between the child and the speech-language pathologist (SLP). To establish a positive rapport, the therapist initially engaged in normal conversation with the child. During the picture description task, a total of ten sets of picture cards were used, each representing the simple present, simple past, and simple future tenses. The child was instructed to describe what will happen, what is happening, and what has happened in the pictures. The child was asked to provide descriptions in both languages. Each session was recorded using the PRAAT software.

F. Scoring

The responses were recorded and scored, with a value of 1 given for each correct response, 0 for incorrect responses, and NR indicating no response.

G. Statistical Analysis

The collected data was summarized by using the Descriptive Statistics: frequency, percentage, mean and S.D. To compare between Malayalam and English language as well as oral and written, the Paired “t” test was used. Independent sample “t” test was used to compare between the age groups. The p value < 0.05 was considered as significant. Data was analyzed by using the SPSS software (SPSS Inc.; Chicago, IL) version 26.0.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the comparison of tense markers in L1 (Malayalam) and L2(English) within the group.

			Malayalam		English		"t"	p value	Significance
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Present tense	8 to 10	Oral	10	0	9.9	0.3	1	0.343	NS
		Written	10	0	9.7	0.5	1.96	0.081	NS
	11 to 13	Oral	10	0	10	0	--	--	--
		Written	10	0	10	0	--	--	--
Simple past	8 to 10	Oral	10	0	7.4	1.3	6.50	< 0.001	S
		Written	10	0	8.7	0.9	4.33	0.002	S
	11 to 13	Oral	10	0	9.7	0.7	1.41	0.193	NS
		Written	9.9	0.3	10	0	-1	0.343	NS
Simple future	8 to 10	Oral	10	0	6.6	1.5	7.14	< 0.001	S
		Written	8.7	1.3	8.2	1.2	1	0.343	NS
	11 to 13	Oral	10	0	8.8	1.2	3.09	0.013	S
		Written	10	0	10	0	--	--	--

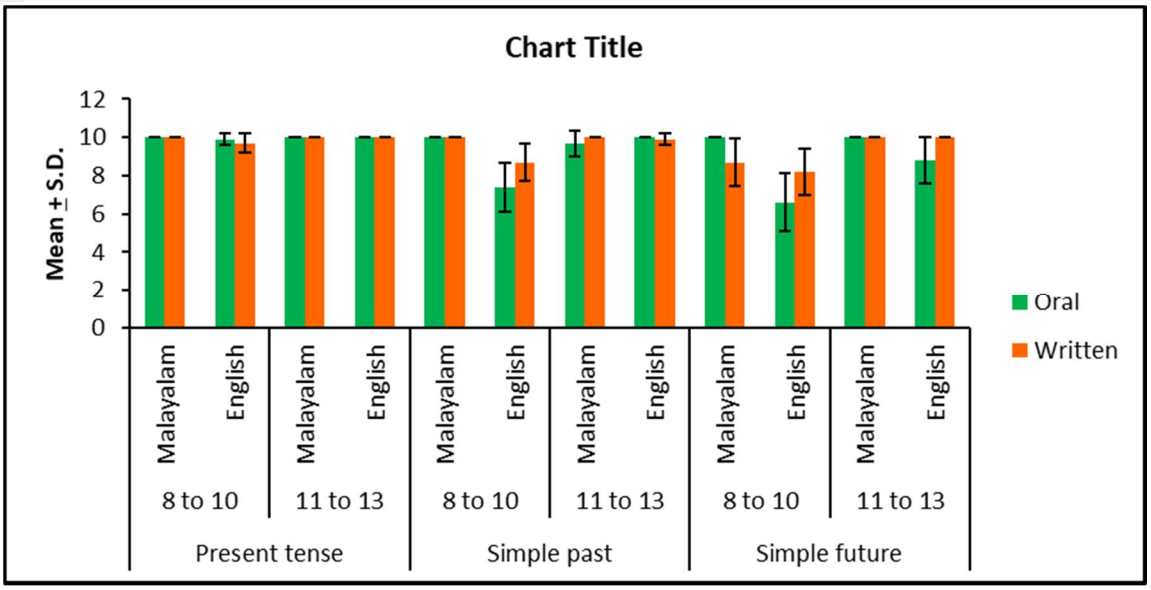

Figure 1 shows the comparison of tense markers in L1 (Malayalam) and L2(English) within group.

Table 1 and Figure 1 shows the performance of tense markers in oral and written language for Malayalam and English in two age groups: 8 to 10 years and 11 to 13 years. In 8 to 10 year old children, the acquisition of the simple present tense for both oral and written tasks in Malayalam and English was non significant and the acquisition of the simple past tense for both tasks in Malayalam and English was significant. However, the acquisition of the simple future tense in oral tasks for both languages was significant, while the written performance for future tense acquisition in both languages was non significant. For children aged 11 to 13 years, the acquisition of the simple present tense for oral and written tasks in Malayalam and English was inconclusive and the acquisition of the simple past tense for oral and written tasks in both Malayalam and English was non significant. The acquisition of the future tense for oral tasks was significant whereas for written tasks, it was inconclusive in both languages.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study aims to describe the comparison of the acquisition of tense markers in oral and written language of children in 8 - 12 year old Malayalam -English bilingual children. The participants involve 20 typically developing children, studying in regular school with English as the medium of instruction. Based on the chronological age the children were further divided into two groups. All the groups consisted of ten equal number of participants. Two tasks were selected which include oral and written picture description and narration. The result revealed that in 8 to 10-year-old children, the acquisition of the simple present tense for both oral and written tasks in Malayalam and English was non significant and the acquisition of the simple past tense for both tasks in Malayalam and English was significant. However, the acquisition of the simple future tense in oral tasks for both languages was significant, while the written performance for future tense acquisition in both languages was non significant. For children aged 11 to 13 years, the acquisition of simple present tense for oral and written tasks in Malayalam and English was inconclusive and the acquisition of simple past tense for oral and written tasks in both Malayalam and English was non significant. The acquisition of future tense for oral tasks was significant whereas for written tasks it was inconclusive in both languages. From this study, it is clear that as the age progresses the acquisition of tense markers in both L1 and L2 improves and also there was a consistency in the acquisition of tense markers. Simple present tense is acquired first followed by simple past and then simple future tense in both L1 and L2, which was in accordance with the study by Santhana et al 2015, who investigated the acquisition of tense markers in typically developing 4-7 year old Malayalam speaking children and the result revealed highly significant scores among tense markers across the age groups. The children in the older group performed well compared to the younger group in all tense markers.

VI. CONCLUSION

Tense markers play a crucial role in conveying temporal information in language. In both Malayalam and English, tense markers enable speakers and writers to express actions in the past, present, and future. The acquisition of tense markers is a significant milestone in children's language development.

VII. LIMITATIONS

1) The age group selected for the study was limited to 8 to 10 years and 11 to 13 years.
2) A large sample size would have yielded more reliable results.

VIII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

1) Study can be carried out in other languages.

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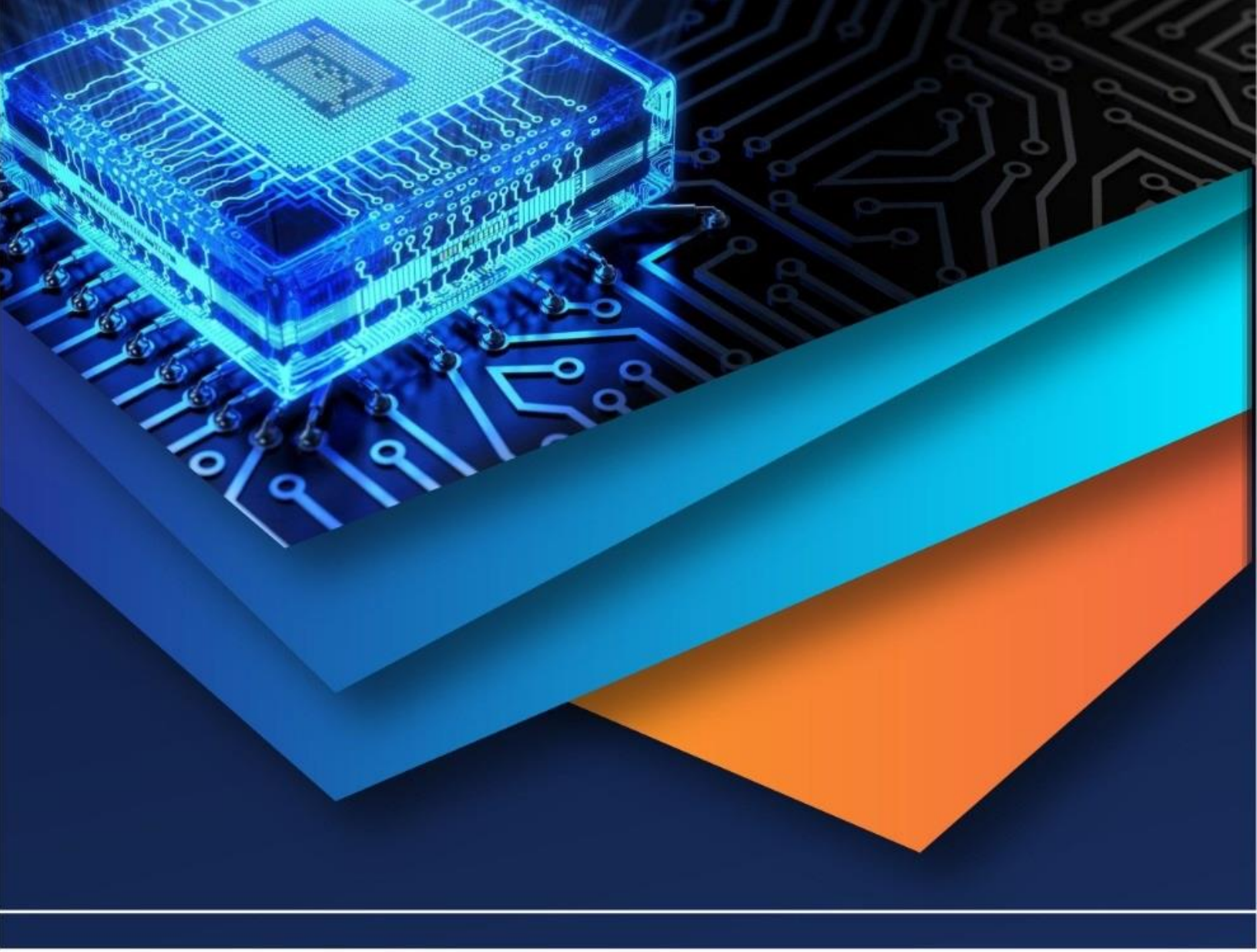

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