Modal morphology in child Tamil

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Agenda

- Key theoretical notions regarding the acquisition of mood

- Cross-linguistic patterns of mood acquisition

- Modality in Tamil

- Corpus study

- Proposed future work

Modality in child language

- Early on in child grammars, a distinction is made between realis and irrealis (modal)

- The primal modal distinction in child language between what is or was and what is desired, required, or possible (root or deontic modality)

- Epistemic modality, distinguishing between what is and what is possible or probable, tends to appear later

Modal alternations

- ## Root Infinitives (RIs)
  - ### Use of infinitive morphosyntax in root clauses
  - ### Found in a variety of languages
    - Dutch:

      Papa schoenen wass-en

      father shoes   wash-Inf
    - French:

      Michel   dorm-ir

      Michael sleep-Inf

Modal alternations

- Generalizations about RIs
  - Largely modal
    - "The Modal Reference Effect" (MRE)
  - Most frequently occur with eventive verbs
    - "The Eventivity Constraint" (EC)
  - Appear because of a lack of tense specification in child irrealis
    - "The Semantic Opposition Hypothesis" (SOH)

Modal alternations

- Root Imperatives
  - Italian, which lacks RIs, has a considerably higher proportion of imperatives in child speech than in adult speech
  - Salustri and Hyams suggest this as an RI analogue

- Bare Perfectives
  - Greek children use perfective morphology without marked tense similarly to RIs

Modal alternations

- All of these languages seem to maintain correspondence between lack of tense morphology (SOH), eventive verbs (EC), and deontic interpretation (MRE)

Tamil Mood

- Expressed by auxiliary verbs attached to infinitive, or tensed verbs proceeding infinitive

  - pō-kka-muṭi

    go-Inf-can

  - paṭi-kka var-um

    read-Inf come-3sn.Prs

- Imperative is expressed with a bare verb stem

  - pō!

    go

Tamil Mood

- Nominal morphology distinguishes 'want to' from 'must'

  - Enakku capṭ-a-ṇum   'I want to eat'
  - I.Dat   eat-Inf-Must

  - Nā<u>n</u>   capṭ-a-ṇum   'I must eat'
  - I.Nom eat-Inf-Must

Previous studies

- Previous work on Tamil modals in acquisition is limited

  - Raghavendra and Leonard (1989) find this morphology to be acquired between 2;2 and 2;6

  - Negative modal form vēṇṭām appears as general negation form very early (Vaidyanathan 1991)

- General knowledge of dative/nominative subject split found to come early (Sarma 1999), but relation to modality not studied previously

Corpus study

- Data from the Vanitha corpus on CHILDES
  - Previously analyzed by Sarma (1999) regarding word order, case, and agreement, and Thomas and Vainikka (1994) regarding sentence structure

- 1,984 utterances across 25 transcripts from 0;9 to 2;9
  - Includes a 4-month gap from 1;9 to 2;1

Corpus study

- Vanitha uses the bare verb stem for a variety of purposes
  - Up to 1;7, past and present tensed verbs
    - bam pann-ann-a 'She's doing bam' (using a firecracker)
      bam do-Prs-3sf
  - Up to 1;8, future tensed verbs
    - ammā acc(u)   'Mother (will) spank'
      mama spank
  - Up to 2;1, deontic modals
    - tū-kki encu   '(I want to) throw (this) away'
      away-Dat throw

Corpus study

- Bare verb stems are allowed some inflection

  - vari-yā   '(Are you) coming?'

    come-Q

- One apparent RI

  - nā(n) vari-kka-vā   '(Shall) I come?'

    I   come-Inf-Q

Corpus study

- Vanitha acquires the correct morphology for finite verbs early on, but modals persist in using bare morphology much longer

  - This can be seen as prediction of MRE

- Most of Vanitha's verbs in general are eventive, so effect of EC on modals can't be evaluated

Corpus study

- Future morphology is acquired closer to modals than present and past

  - Future is semantically similar to irrealis

  - Could this be the SOH in action?

    – Future assigned to Mood before T

  - If so, what is the place of the infinitive morpheme, that it is not acquired at this stage?

Worth noting

- Tamil's use of infinitives in modal constructions in adult grammar should make RIs an option for learners, but evidence for RIs is scant

- Relationship between imperative and irrealis interpretation is similar to conclusions about Italian, but lacks the same morphological evidence

  - However, Salustri and Hyams link root imperatives to null subjects, which applies here

Future study

- More data is needed to make real conclusions about the acquisition of this verbal morphology in Tamil

- Is Vanitha's single RI an aberration? Do other children use the bare stem/imperative option more, or is the RI (or another strategy) employed by other Tamil learners?

Future study

- Modals of desire and requirement come earliest for Vanitha, compared to English for which 'can' is the earliest. Is this common to Tamil learners?

- More naturalistic data are the best way to answer most of these questions.

Case and Mood in Tamil

- Vanitha appears to show knowledge of the want/need distinction by 2;1.
    - ēkku pinnu pōtta-ka-num   'I want to wear the pin'
      I.Dat pin   wear-Inf-Must
    - cāyankālam tinnu-ka-num   '(one) must eat in the
      evening   eat-Inf-Must   evening'
- Tends to use overt subject for 'want' (Dative) more often than 'must' (Nominative)

Case and Mood in Tamil

- Will similar patterns emerge based on experimentation?

- Proposed experiment:
  - Truth value judgment
    - Present stories in which a character *must* do something, contrast with story where a character *wants to* do something
    - Prompts: Dative subject, Nominative subject, Null subject

Case and Mood in Tamil

This is a story about Sita, Mother, and Father. Sita is sitting in her room. Father says, what is Sita doing? Mother says, she is doing nothing. Father says, Sita shouldn't do nothing. She likes to read. She should read. Sita says, I read enough at school. I should play. Father says, But if you don't read you will not do well on your test next week. Mother says, yes, you should read. So Sita says, ok, I will read. So Sita read.

- Sītā patti, **ava** paṭikkānum

- Sītā patti, **avaḷukku** paṭikkānum

- Sītā patti, (*pro*) paṭikkānum

Case and Mood in Tamil

- Explicitly tests knowledge of noun/mood association

- Tests -*num*, so requires verbs that are acquired later

- Should be appropriate for children around 2;0

References

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Thanks!

- Please help.