

Acquisition of English Modals (Auxiliaries) in Negative Sentences by Marathi-speaking Children: A study in Second Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

In order to facilitate language pedagogy, it is necessary to understand the learner's path/order of learning as also, learner needs, and the role of diverse conditions under which human learning takes place. With this in mind, the development of the auxiliary system in Negative constructions in various contexts in the process of acquisition of English by Marathi-speaking children was studied longitudinally. The present paper is just an attempt to understand the development of English Modals in Negative sentences. It is concerned with the acquisition order and the amount of time taken by these second language learners to acquire this category properly. The study made it possible to identify the differences/similarities in the order of learning of modals across second language learners.

Key words: modals, auxiliary, acquisition order, second language

Introduction

Performance Analysis (Acquisition Order and Developmental Studies) is one of the most important approaches to Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It helps to observe learners' interlanguages at different stages of development and thus provides insights into: 1. the order in which a particular target language feature is acquired in relation to others. 2. the developmental sequences. This knowledge facilitates language learning/pedagogy.

The present paper describes the acquisition of English Modals in Negative sentences in various contexts by three Marathi-speaking

children. (age group: 9-11). The purpose of this paper is to establish an order of acquisition and to find out the amount of time taken by them to acquire modals properly.

Literature Survey

Acquisition of a specific linguistic feature, phonology, morphemes and syntactic structures (auxiliaries, negatives and interrogatives) have been treated extensively in L1 and L2 acquisition literature.

The sixties and seventies have seen a large number of studies (cross-sectional/longitudinal/case/experimental studies) of L1 and L2 acquisition particularly of English

as a mother tongue and as a second language. These studies have attempted to investigate language acquisition processes, order /developmental sequences in the acquisition of a specific target language feature.

L1 child language acquisition/development studies have reported a fairly well-defined pattern and systematicity in the acquisition process.

First Language Morpheme studies (Brown, 1973 and de Villiers & de Villiers, 1973) have encouraged Second Language Acquisition researchers to undertake a similar type of research. For example, Child second language cross-sectional studies by Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974, 1975) and also by others (Kessler and Idar, 1977, Rosansky, 1976).

A similar order of acquisition has been reported by Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974) and Larsen-Freeman (1975) in their Adult second language acquisition studies. Krashen (1977) proposed that a natural order of morpheme acquisition existed for certain morphemes in English L2. Kessler and Idar, (1977) tried to focus on L1 Acquisition Order = L2 Learning Order for English.

Acquisition of modals as forms of the auxiliary has also been studied. A consideration of modality especially in English and also in some other languages (e.g. Greek) lends support to regularity in the learning process. (Stephany, 1984; Leopold, 1949; Ervin, 1964; Klima and Bellugi, 1966; Bellugi, 1971, 1974; Kuczaj and Maratsos, 1975; Kuczaj and Daly, 1979;

Mawby, 1981; Major, 1974; Fletcher, 1979; Wells, 1979 etc.)

Thus the similarity observed in Order of language acquisition is striking though some variations are there.

The Study

The present paper deals with acquisition of modals (auxiliary-one class of grammatical morphemes) in negative constructions by Marathi-speaking children and attempts to find out

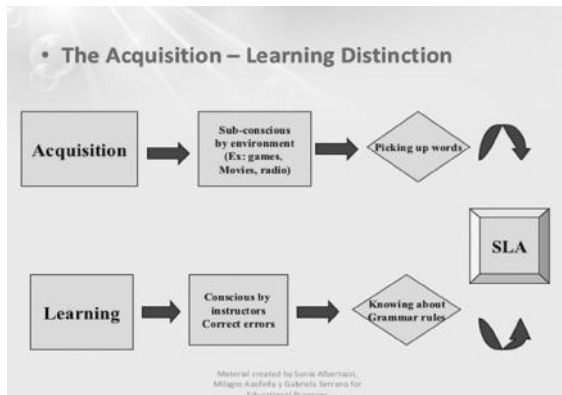
- i. the similarity/difference in the acquisition process
- ii. a common order of acquisition of Modals across learners
- iii. the amount of time taken by the learners to acquire Modals

Methodology

The data (oral/written negative sentences) for this study were collected by giving tuitions privately to three children for two and a half hours thrice a week for 27 months. This observation period was divided into 9 stages (each stage of a duration of 3 months).

The three subjects from middleclass Marathi-speaking families belonged to a non-westernized section of Mumbai. They fitted into neither the first language nor the second language category as they were second language learners but studying in an English-medium school but using mainly Marathi at home and even in school. Thus unlike other studies, in the present study the learners were placed in a mixed L1-L2 situation which involves both 'learning' and 'acquisition' (Krashen, 1988).

Such a mixed situation normally exists in India.



These students were less exposed to a formal teaching situation. Moreover, teaching was done with only occasional attention to syntax and was mainly concerned with informal activities and informal talk in natural contexts.

Data Analysis and Results

The collected data were analyzed descriptively. The percentage of correct sentences (spoken and written) in the three contextual conditions (Greater Context + Limited Context + No Context) out of the total correct and incorrect sentences produced in each category at each stage was used to measure the order of acquisition. A 70% accuracy level was decided as the criterion level for learning.

All responses at each stage for the categories of modals in negative sentences were analyzed. The effect of contextualization on the stages of learning of Modals in negative sentences was studied.

In the data analysis, only individual sentences were considered as the framework of analysis was syntactic.

The students' negative responses were analyzed to yield three categories involving modals:

Category No 3NP+MOD+NEG+MV

For example, "I will not eat more".

Modals like can-could, shall -should, will-would, may, might, must and semi/marginal-modals like dare and need are used here.

Use of a single modal makes this Category grammatically less complicated but semantically complex as modals have different shades of meaning.

Category No 4 NP+MOD+NEG+be+pres/past participle

Example, "It cannot be thrilling."

"This cannot be tried in this way."

The presence of more auxiliaries increases its grammatical complexity and the modal makes it semantically complex.

Category No 5 NP+MOD+NEG+have+(been) +PRES/PAST PART

Example, "You should not have gone."

"The work should not have been done."

Here the combination of modals and perfective makes it grammatically more complex and semantic redundancy is due to Modals.

Findings

The students' performance on these categories is as follows:

Subject no 1 (Smita), a very intelligent student according to her examination results and teacher's opinion. She was careful, hardworking and sincere.

Her performance in Category 3 was found

to be excellent. It showed steady development. But fluctuations could be seen right through in Category 4 and Category 5.

The following are illustrations of student's responses:

Category 3

"I cannot remember" (GC)

**"She may need not count it". (GC)

Category 4

"She may not be weeping." (GC)

**"This information must need not be passed out." (GC)

Category 5

"I would not have gone." (GC)

**"She would not have dry clothes. "(GC)

Subject No 2 (Sagar): According to his teacher and his examination results, he was a good student. He was a very cheerful student with good grasping power.

Like Subject No 1, his performance was found to be steady and excellent in Category 3. As far as his Categories 4 and 5 are concerned the performance could only be considered as 'satisfactory' as fluctuations could be seen up to Stage VIII.

The Examples of student's responses:

Category 3

"You can't wait." (GC)

** He dare not did it." (GC)

Category 4

"I shall not be preparing breakfast. "(GC)

**"The frock cannot be tear in the machine." (GC)

Category 5

**"I would not have operate it" (GC)

"I might not have re-read that book." (GC)

Subject No 3 (Vaibhav)He was initially classified as an average learner, on the basis of previous examinations and teacher opinion. Initially he was careless and not interested. But later on, he became serious about the process.

Steady development could be seen in all these categories, though the performance seemed to be poor in certain stages.

*Means grammatically incorrect

Specimen examples occurring in the text are:

Category 3

"I can not pass the exam". (GC)

**" You can't walked". (GC)

Category 4

"His movie can not be boring". (GC)

**"It cannot be do". (GC)

Category 5

"He could not have come". (GC)

**"I would not have stand there". (GC)

Thus, Category No 3 showed learners' steady progress whereas Categories 4 and 5 reflected unsteady progress.

All these categories in Negative sentences developed over the nine stages for all learners. At entry point their performance differed from one another but at exit point they were on *par*. Each Stage shows some development. These learners have 'learnt' these categories.

Stages of Learning	CATEGORIES of MODALS		
STUDENTS	Smita	Sagar	Vaibhav
I			
II			
III	Category 3		
IV			
V		Category 3	
VI			Category 3
VII			
VIII	Category 4		Category 5
IX	Category 5	Categories 4, 5	Category 4

Stages of Learning

CATEGORIES of MODALS

ORDER of DIFFICULTY	CATEGORIES
EASY	Category 3
AVERAGE DIFFICULT	
DIFFICULT	Categories 4, 5
VERY DIFFICULT	

A broad pattern of similarity reflects across the learners in the stages of learning and the rate of development for these categories. Like some other L1/L2 studies (Cazden, 1968; Cancino, Rosansky, Schumann, 1974/1975; Hakuta, 1975) there is no absolute uniformity among these learners in the acquisition of the categories due to individual variations such as previous knowledge of that structure, level of understanding, psychological factors resulting in early/late learning.

The categories which are 'learnt' early are considered to be easier than the categories

learnt later.

The Order of Difficulty for the Categories of Modals

Since Category 3 is grammatically less complex, it is relatively 'easy' to acquire. In some L1 and L2 studies of language development also, the early appearance/acquisition of some of the elements involved in Category 3 is documented. (Heckler, 1975).

As Categories 4 and 5 involve grammatical complexity as well as semantic redundancy, they are 'difficult' to learn.

All these learners used almost all modals.

The Order in which some of the Modals appeared in the speech of these learners was similar.

This **order of appearance of modals** is as follows:

Stage I; Can; Could; Shall; Should; will

Stage II: Would; Must; Might (for one student)

This finds support in some other studies. (Wells, 1979; Major, 1974).

Conclusion

There are some similarities in the learning of modals across all three learners. The Order found in this study to a certain extent ratifies the order given in other studies of L1 and L2. It can be said that even in a mixed situation other than strictly L1 or L2, the same kind of conclusions can be drawn. It took a six-month period for the effect of teaching/learning to show. Small group teaching technique is more effective as it provides rich input/exposure. A combination of subconscious mechanisms

and conscious efforts seem to lead to effective L2 acquisition.

Language learning will be more effective when the teaching strategies are in harmony with learning processes. These results are expected to be useful for application to syllabus design and classroom teaching.

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