

Inflectional morphology in children 'at risk' for dyslexia

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Dyslexia and SLI

- SLI, an oral language difficulty, predates schooling and a proportion of children with SLI go on to develop dyslexia (Leonard, 1998)
- This presentation takes a perspective on dyslexia as a grammatical impairment, in particular, an impairment in inflectional morphology (Ullman, 1999)
- Inflectional morphology difficult for SLI populations in English (Leonard, 1998), German (Clahsen, 1989), Italian, Japanese, Hebrew, Greek (Ullman & Gopnik, 1999)

- Identification of SLI in L2 situation problematic because of:
 1. Incomplete L2 acquisition
 2. Difficulties of SLI and SLA populations similar: instances of “missed identity” and “mistaken identity” (Paradis, 2005; Cummins, 2000)

- Hence the need to assess on parallel tasks in L1 and L2
- Tasks used for this purpose: production and judgment of regular and irregular verbs and nouns in L1 (Malayalam) and L2 (English)

The sample

17 Malayalam-English bilinguals, out of a population of 30

Class 3, mean age 8;5,

“English-medium” school

schooled in English (L2) for 5 years,

fluent speakers of L1, but literacy in L1 limited

The hypothesis

- SLI not language specific –manifests across L1 and L2.
- Children at risk for SLI should perform poorly on L1 and L2 tasks
- Anticipating the results, identified 5 children as the outliers on 1.5 SDs below Mean on 16 tasks in English and Malayalam
- Account for more than two-thirds of errors on all the tasks.

- Outlier in English, is outlier in Malayalam too.
SLI manifests across L1 and L2
- Similar lexical categories pose problems in English and Malayalam
- In English tasks, all subjects make errors
- In Malayalam only outliers make errors

Tasks

- English and Malayalam
- Production and Judgment
- Real and Novel regular and irregular past tense verbs
- Real and Novel noun plurals

Results: Group

- English:
Production: regulars – ceiling
irregulars: very low, overregularized
novel regulars – ceiling
novel irregulars – regularized
- Judgment: lower than production – unexpected –
response bias

- Malayalam:

Production: ceiling

Judgment: slightly lower, not significant,

No response bias in L1

- Outliers on parallel tasks in both languages: 5 subjects (1 girl, 4 boys):
LA, JG, JE, RA, VF

Error pattern typical of the SLI profile:

- produce unmarked forms,
- reject past marked and plural marked forms,
- accept stem forms.

Conclusion

- Language impairment not language-specific – manifests across L1 and L2
- Matched according to lexical categories
- Error pattern distinguishes at-risk group from unimpaired group – all outliers not at risk – cline

- Malayalam: *-i* identifiable as regular: no stem allomorphy, overregularization
- Further research with ESL groups across L1 and L2 to validate findings

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