

Specific Language Impairment in Kannada: Evidence From a Morphologically Complex Language

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Abstract : Impairments of syntactic morphology are often considered central in children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI). In English and related languages, deficits of tense-related grammatical morphology could serve as a clinical marker of SLI. Yet, cross-linguistic studies on SLI in the recent past suggest that the nature and severity of morphosyntactic deficits in children with SLI varies with the language being investigated. Therefore, in the present study we investigated the morphosyntactic deficits in a group of children with SLI who speak Kannada, a morphologically complex Dravidian language spoken in Indian subcontinent. A group of 15 children with SLI participated in this study. Two more groups of typical developing children (15 each) matched for language and age to children with SLI, were included as control participants. All participants were assessed for morphosyntactic comprehension and expression using standardized language test and a spontaneous speech task. Results of the study showed that children with SLI differed significantly from age-matched but not language-matched control group, on tasks of both comprehension and expression of morphosyntax. This finding is, however, in contrast with the reports of English-speaking children with SLI who are reported to be poorer than younger MLU-matched children on tasks of morphosyntax. The observed difference in impairments of morphosyntax in Kannada-speaking children with SLI from English-speaking children with SLI is explained based on the morphological richness theory. The theory predicts that children with SLI perform relatively better in morphologically rich language due to occurrence of their frequent and consistent features that mark the morphological markers. The authors, therefore, conclude that language-specific features do influence manifestation of the disorder in children with SLI.

Keywords : specific language impairment, morphosyntax, Kannada, manifestation

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